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STRATTON

by the same author

**JOURNAL OF A HUSBANDMAN
THIS WAY TO THE TOMB
HOME-MADE HOME**

STRATTON

a play by

RONALD DUNCAN

FABER AND FABER LTD

24 Russell Square

London

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Dedicated to
ROSE MARIE

Io mi rivolsi 'n dietro allora tutto
a' miei poeti, e vidi che con riso
udito avean l'ultimo costruito;
poi alla bella donna torna 'il viso.

CHARACTERS

SIR CORY STRATTON, K.C.

LADY MARIA STRATTON, his wife

CORY STRATTON, his son

KATHERINE, his son's fiancée

THE REV. JOHN COURTENAY

CAPTAIN MARSDEN, estate manager

HARDWICKE, Sir Cory's secretary

DR. QUARLES, Family Doctor

MR. NASHE, Family Solicitor

PROSECUTOR

CLERK OF THE COURT

THE PRISONER

LAMBOURNE, Butler

FOREMAN OF THE JURY

This play was first produced on 31st October 1949 at the Theatre Royal, Brighton.

I am much indebted to Mr. Clive Brook, who played the part of Sir Cory Stratton, for making several suggestions which I incorporated into this text; and also for helping me to reduce it to the version which was acted.

R. D.

The music for this play was composed by Mr. Benjamin Britten. The score is obtainable from Messrs. Boosey & Hawkes, Ltd., 295 Regent Street, London, W.1. Recordings made by the English Opera Group Orchestra are obtainable from Jack de Leon, Ltd., Gloucester House, Charing Cross Road, London, W.C.

Inquiries concerning the performing rights should be addressed to Margery Vosper Ltd., 32 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.1.

ACT ONE

THE PROLOGUE. As described	<i>page</i> 11
SCENE I. Kirnstone Manor, the Hall. June	11
SCENE II. The Central Criminal Court. October	52

ACT TWO

Kirnstone Manor, the Hall. The Next Day	59
---	----

ACT THREE

Kirnstone Manor, the Hall. November	88
-------------------------------------	----

ACT FOUR

Kirnstone Manor, the Hall. The Next Day	119
---	-----

PROLOGUE AND ACT ONE

Scene I

Music is heard before the Curtain Rises on the hall of Kirnstone Manor. It is almost dark; but the walls are seen to be of stone. A large door and an open staircase leading to a balcony are at the back of the stage. The walls are hung with several family portraits. A bare space shows that one is missing.

STRATTON stands facing the audience. He is staring at a portrait which has been flung on the floor.

The music continues.

MARIA drags herself along the balcony behind STRATTON. She appears lame and hideously old. STRATTON turns and sees her. She comes down the stairs. As he makes a movement towards her, MARIA is instantly transformed and becomes radiantly beautiful. All the movements are stylized and formal, suggesting the remoteness of a dream.

Above the music a voice is heard—it is contemplative not declamatory—saying:

‘What a thing is man,
His life’s a dream
His death is all sleep.
His dream’s without refuge
And his sleep holds no peace.’

Slowly MARIA moves or appears to be drawn inevitably towards STRATTON whose hands rise like an automaton’s to enclose her neck. He strangles her. There is no sign of violence or anger. Above the music a voice is heard saying:

*'What a thing is man.
Destroying what he loves,
Desiring what he hates.
He'll wound you with a knife
Then wash the wound with tears.'*

The body falls. The scene grows darker. Only STRATTON can be seen staring fixedly at his own portrait which hangs on the wall. Above the music a voice is heard saying:

*'What a thing is man.
He worships himself,
And denies his God.
His life is all despair
For what is man but pride?'*

There is a brief blackout during which Stratton disappears. The music continues and transforms the scene into a gay sunny afternoon. A girl's laughter is heard.

CORY

What are you laughing at?

KATHERINE

Nothing.

CORY

Liar.

KATHERINE

Kiss me again.

(He does so.)

CORY

You're laughing at me!

KATHERINE

No, darling, I'm laughing at your father.

CORY

At Father?

KATHERINE

(*Teasingly*) Yes, does that shock you—or mustn't one even laugh at the great man?

CORY

No, but why think of him when I'm kissing you?

KATHERINE

Because he is looking over your shoulder. He stares as though he disapproves. I think he's jealous.

CORY

What do you mean?

KATHERINE

(*She gets up and goes across the room to the portraits facing her.*) I suppose you're so accustomed to the presence of your ancestors that you take these ghosts for granted? But to me they make this room into a sort of family sepulchre. And they frighten me a little.

CORY

Nonsense, darling. In a day or two you won't notice them.

KATHERINE

I don't know. Life's much too frail a thing not to be embarrassed by the sight of the dead even when painted by Van Dyck. (*She moves on to another portrait and reads the inscription*) "Sir Cory Stratton, 1593-1659." What was he?

CORY

He was a judge but . . .

KATHERINE

But what?

CORY

We're not exactly proud of the fact.

KATHERINE

Why?

CORY

If you must know, he was the judge who condemned his King to death, and as a reward for perverting Justice to political expediency, Cromwell gave him this Estate. He built this house on the remains of an old Cornish monastery.

KATHERINE

(*Disinterested*) Did he? . . . (*She continues round the room*) "Admiral Sir Cory Stratton, 1738" . . . "General Sir Cory Stratton, 1816" . . . Only the dates differ. The name is the same. The face is the same. And here is your father, "Sir Cory Stratton, K.C., 1946". Now do you see why I was laughing? I felt he was watching us. Don't you find these portraits rather oppressive?

CORY

I don't notice them.

KATHERINE

(*Teasingly*) Yes, it's different for you. But I feel as though I were now engaged to you all.
I wonder how long it will be before your portrait
Stares down at your son,
Who has carried the mask further?
And where will I be, then?

CORY

(*Looking through window*) No doubt sitting on the lawn with me,
Just as Mother is now with Father,
And look how happy they are!

KATHERINE

(*She kisses him*) Yes, you're so fond of them, aren't you?

CORY

We can be as they are.

KATHERINE

But no more; for the pattern is permanent.
They are talking about us.
We are talking about them.
How often has this house
Witnessed the same charade?
Is this its continuity?

CORY

Yes, and in your eyes, its hidden purpose lies.
(*He kisses her. MARIA comes in.*)
(*To MARIA*) Well, what did Father say?

MARIA

He's as excited over your engagement as if it were his own.
He insists on a Michaelmas wedding.

KATHERINE

Why?

MARIA

We were married in September, too . . .

KATHERINE

I see. . . .

(*Enter HARDWICKE from Library right. He tries to go through the room unnoticed.*)
(*Turning*) And where are you going, Hardwicke, with such deliberate casualness?

HARDWICKE

I was looking for Sir Cory, Lady Stratton.

MARIA

That's what I feared. Do have some pity on him. This is the first week he's had at Kirnstone for months.

CORY

What is it, Hardwicke, can't you deal with it?

HARDWICKE

I don't think so, sir. This morning I've already declined the freedom of the city of Cardiff and politely refused to dine with the Worshipful Company of Silversmiths and The Merchant Venturers of Bristol.

MARIA

Then who is there you cannot deal with?

HARDWICKE

The Lord Chancellor.

MARIA

Why, what does Lord Manning want?

CORY

He wants Father to accept the Central Criminal Court. It's vacant again since Ponsonby died.

MARIA

(To HARDWICKE) And hasn't Sir Cory answered the Chancellor's offer?

HARDWICKE

Yes, of course. I have his refusal here. But before I could post it, Lord Manning phoned to ask Sir Cory to reconsider his decision—he seemed to have anticipated this reply. So I was just taking the original letter to Sir Cory in case he wished to draft another.

CORY

I don't think you need bother, Hardwicke. I'm sure nothing will persuade Father to change his mind.

KATHERINE

But isn't it an honour to be made a Judge. Why does he refuse?

CORY

(*Indulgently*) Well, could you condemn a man to death?

KATHERINE

Certainly, if he were guilty.

CORY

And how would you decide that?

KATHERINE

By the law, of course.

CORY

Yes, that's just what he did. (*Glancing at portrait of the Judge*) He called the prisoner: "A tyrant, a traitor and a murderer," and with those very words he condemned his own King to death. But history often has a way of altering the perspective: and now we see that the prisoner was, in fact, the Judge, and it was he, the Judge, who was both traitor and murderer. This has happened once in our family and that is why my father always refuses to become a judge.

KATHERINE

But he made his name in murder trials, didn't he?

CORY

Yes, as counsel for the defence, never as prosecutor.

MARIA

No, you need not worry Sir Cory with that letter. I'm sure it can wait. Is there anything else?

HARDWICKE

Yes. Captain Marsden has an appointment with Sir Cory. He's in the library talking to the Vicar.

MARIA

(To CORY) Is John here too? I thought he was still in Exeter?

CORY

He came back this morning. I suppose he's come up to put in an hour on his biography. (To KATHERINE) He was commissioned to write Father's biography years ago.

MARIA

Then ask Captain Marsden to join us here, Hardwicke.

HARDWICKE

Very well.

(HARDWICKE goes out right.)

MARIA

Cory, wouldn't you see him? It's such a shame to disturb your father so soon after his arrival. Besides he seems a little preoccupied this morning.

CORY

I could, but what's worrying him?

MARIA

Oh, I don't know. He did say something or other about some recurring dream.

CORY

How unlike him.

MARIA

Yes, a dream he couldn't remember. Anyhow I think you'd better see Marsden. It's such a blessing when a son can take his father's place so easily—don't you agree, Katherine?

KATHERINE

(Quietly) Yes, I do.

CORY

. . . But I'd better fetch Father.

KATHERINE

Why, Cory, surely you can deputise?

CORY

Not exactly, besides estate affairs are a sort of relaxation for him. He's got a scheme of afforestation at Underhill. I believe he's arranging to get the saplings from Lord Hartland's place.

KATHERINE

There, you do know all about it!

CORY

But he likes to decide himself.

MARIA

Perhaps you're right, Cory. You'd better fetch him. He'd probably like to deal with that himself. I expect he walked down to the river, he's always drawn there when he's worried.

CORY

I'll send the car down for him.

KATHERINE

I thought we were going to have a game of tennis. Don't keep me waiting too long.

(CORY goes out, back stage.)

MARIA

You've made him very happy.

KATHERINE

Who?

MARIA

Who? Why Cory, of course—and his father too.

KATHERINE

Of course. I find it so confusing their having the same name.

MARIA

Yes, it is at first. But every woman likes to see her son grow to the image of his father and bear the same name. . . .

(*Enter CAPTAIN MARSDEN and the REV. JOHN COURTENAY from Library.*)

Good afternoon, Marsden. Sir Cory will be in in a few minutes. Katherine, dear, I think you've already met John.

KATHERINE

Yes, on Sunday. I was most impressed with your sermon.

COURTENAY

So was I. It was one of Donne's. . . . "If you weigh anything in a scale, the greater it is, the lower it sinks; as you grow greater and greater in the eyes of the world sink lower and lower in your own. . . ."

MARIA

You'll stay to dinner, John?

COURTENAY

"... And he that stands in the highest of the heights is weighed down by that which is nothing; and for what is any monarch to the whole world? And the whole world is that; but what? But nothing. . . ." Of course I will stay to dinner.

MARIA

Good—we'll make a little party of it. I must go and see Lambourne.

MARSDEN

And may I be the first to wish you happiness on the news of your engagement?

KATHERINE

News?

MARSDEN

Not exactly. Nothing is news in Cornwall. Gossip anticipates all events; and rumour reports them before they occur. But I hope I don't . . .

KATHERINE

No, it's true. And thank you.

COURTENAY

Splendid. (*He glances round the room at the portraits*) I'm sure everyone's delighted. I'd drink to your health—if I had a drink!

MARIA

Katherine, dear, will you look after John?
(*She goes off, back stage.*)

KATHERINE

(*At sideboard*) Will you have a glass of sherry?

COURTENAY

No, thank you, my dear. Being a bachelor I've too much respect for marriage to drink to it in anything but rum. Cory keeps a bottle for me down there in the cupboard.

KATHERINE

Is this it?

COURTENAY

Yes, there you have my strength which is my weakness. It's a good drink either for a celebration or as consolation. And it

keeps you as warm as indignation and saves you the trouble of picking a quarrel. You should try it, Marsden.

KATHERINE

Will you have some too, Captain Marsden?

MARSDEN

Thank you, but I . . .

COURTENAY

Marsden's a teetotaller, my dear. He indulges in abstinence and enjoys the vice of sustained disapproval. But we're good friends, aren't we, Marsden? Each necessary to the other—for it's his principles which give me the luxury of feeling broad-minded, whilst if I were not comparatively inebriate how could he relish his temperance?

MARSDEN

I don't know about that, Vicar, but I do know you can argue the hind leg off a donkey. Perhaps if you were less persuasive I would be less obstinate.

KATHERINE

But surely you'll drink my health?

MARSDEN

Of course I will. I was merely going to say I preferred whisky to rum.

KATHERINE

Then you're not a teetotaller?

MARSDEN

Oh yes, by comparison with the Vicar.

COURTENAY

There you are, that's what I say, if it weren't for my excess, as you call it, how could you measure your moderation?

KATHERINE

I see you two know each other very well.

COURTENAY

As country neighbours do, we share our privacy so that neither has any; and as good friends, we generously exchange our colds over a cup of tea. Well, I can think of no toast more appropriate than the Stratton motto: "*Ex patre ad filium*".

(They drink.)

KATHERINE

Now why do you both look so solemn?

COURTENAY

Do we? I suppose that's because we felt your responsibility.

KATHERINE

My responsibility?

COURTENAY

You see, the Strattons are a tradition in themselves. Nothing for ten centuries has broken it. From father to son, from son to grandson. Marriage the means, but the family the end. . . .

KATHERINE

How terrifying. I hardly know Sir Cory, what's he really like?

MARSDEN

(Looks at COURTENAY who remains silent) He's a great man.

COURTENAY

As the world knows.

MARSDEN

An exceptional man.

COURTENAY

As she knows.

MARSDEN

And a generous man. . . .

COURTENAY

Yes, as I know.

KATHERINE

Has he no faults then?

COURTENAY

None you would notice.
His character is as secure as this house
On its old foundations.

KATHERINE

But, Corÿ tells me the river was undermining them.

COURTENAY

No, my dear, the Strattons have diverted it.

MARSDEN

Yes, I suppose Sir Cory is one of the best landlords in the county. I ought to know.

COURTENAY

(*Impatient*) He is a proper Christian.

KATHERINE

If you weren't a vicar, that might mean you didn't like him.

COURTENAY

But I am a vicar, so I ought to know.

KATHERINE

No seriously, tell me, as his best friend, what is he really like once you know him?

COURTENAY

He's like his father.

KATHERINE

Whom I didn't know.

COURTENAY

And he's like his son, whom you do know.

KATHERINE

You mean to say he's all virtue?

COURTENAY

Oh more; beside him any man's a sinner. Though I am
Vicar—he is my confessor. . . .

KATHERINE

You tell me, Captain Marsden. I think the Vicar's teasing me.
(*She sits down.*)

MARSDEN

On the contrary. And for a man to be spoken well of behind
his back in Cornwall is not only a recommendation, it's a
miracle!

COURTENAY

(*Slightly overplaying.*)

He is a man to whom success
Comes as a consequence, but no reward; ✓
A man from whom all talents could escape
Though modesty confines them.

The highest honours of the State
Fall upon other men, only when
He has first refused them, not out of pride.
Humility compels him.

KATHERINE

That sounds like a quotation.

COURTENAY

It is a quotation—an Horatian ode about his great-grand-father, the General. (*Looking at portrait*) But equally applicable to Cory. The Strattons never change.

KATHERINE

And yet he's human?

COURTENAY

And so unlike a god, he's lovable.

KATHERINE

But I am marrying the son—not the father.

COURTENAY

Who, my dear, follows his father's footsteps so closely that in describing one you portray the other.

(*On this word, he goes over and looks up at STRATTON's portrait.*

MARSDEN *follows him.*)

KATHERINE

(*Smiling*) But they're not all that alike, are they?

(STRATTON ENTERS, *unobserved by those on the stage.*)

Do you think that's a good portrait?

(STRATTON *stands listening.*)

I think he's better looking than that.

COURTENAY

I shouldn't call him handsome. Distinguished—perhaps.

KATHERINE

Look at those eyes!

COURTENAY

Yes, but the mouth is weak.

KATHERINE

But the chin is strong.

MARSDEN

The Strattons were always proud.

COURTENAY

Yes, he's the eyes of a saint, but the lips of a sinner—a fair portrait of any man.

(STRATTON moves unobserved behind KATHERINE's chair and casually puts his hand on her shoulder. COURTENAY and MARSDEN turn and see him. But KATHERINE, thinking it is the son, CORY, who has returned, takes STRATTON's hand, tenderly fondles it, then lifts it to her lips.)

She looks up and sees it is STRATTON. Her face reveals her confusion, but her hand does not.

STRATTON smiles at her embarrassment, then glances at his hand which she still holds.)

STRATTON

I hear you've just given this hand (*instantly she releases it*) to my son. Congratulations, I'm delighted. (*He kisses her paternally.*)

KATHERINE

I was expecting him.

STRATTON

Of course . . . he's waiting for you down on the court.

KATHERINE

Is he? (*At door*) How much did you overhear?

STRATTON

Enough.

(EXIT KATHERINE. STRATTON turns to COURTENAY.)

I've good friends, haven't I?

Glad to see you back, John—Oh by the way (*he goes across to the desk*) I came across this in the library yesterday when I was looking for something else—it'd fallen down behind two shelves—probably been there for centuries . . . a first edition

—isn't it? (*He hands a book to COURTENAY who sits and examines it.*)

Marsden, how's the hay coming in? I see old Mugford's carrying. He's usually first—it always dries well out there on the cliff. But how are they getting on along the valley?

MARSDEN

Not very well, sir, as usual snatching a load between showers. It looks as if the river will wash most of it away—half the Yennon meadows are under water. And she's still rising.

STRATTON

Yes, the river's looking restless. Let's hope the banks will hold.

I was wondering whether we couldn't put in a grass drier down at the Home Farm. I saw one working in the States last month. I'm sure it would help them out.

MARSDEN

It wouldn't pay, sir. You know how slow they are to take to anything new.

STRATTON

It would in time. Let's put one in and try. Now what about those trees for Underhill?

MARSDEN

That's what I wanted to see you about, sir. I went over and saw Lord Hartland's nurseryman. He'll have enough to plant out the whole with spruce this autumn.

STRATTON

Spruce? Why not oak?

MARSDEN

Spruce will make timber fit to cut in twenty-five years.

STRATTON

And so will oak in a couple of centuries. That ground at Underhill is a good stiff clay, too good to waste on a soft wood. (*Turning to COURTENAY*) Somebody's got to plant hardwoods, there won't be an oak or a walnut in England in a generation. No, we don't want any matchstick timber on Kirnstone. Ride over to Hartland right away, there's a good fellow, and have a look at their oak saplings. And, Marsden, you may like to try my mare.

MARSDEN

Thank you, sir, I would.

(*Exit MARSDEN.*)

STRATTON

Marsden's a good agent, John, but if I didn't watch him, I do believe he'd convert your old church into a chromium plated shippen and make your vicarage a guest house. He's no respect for the past—which is, I suppose, the same thing as to deny the future.

COURTENAY

(*Filling his glass*) Perhaps he's right, Cory:
For most of us have no past
And few of us have any future;
Or if we have, we try to forget the one
And dare not imagine the other.
The present is where we are
And that is more than most of us can bear.
For those whose memories mock them,
Have only one hope for the future,
And that is to forget their past.

STRATTON

You sound very depressed?

COURTENAY

Yes, you wouldn't understand that.

STRATTON

What's wrong?

COURTENAY

Oh, leave it.

STRATTON

Tell me, perhaps I can help.

COURTENAY

Help? Yes, that's the word which best describes a failure;
Just as envy defines success.
And that is where we are, the best of friends, of course——

STRATTON

What's up with you? Come and sit down, John. Tell me, what
do you make of Katherine?

COURTENAY

She asked me what I thought of you.

STRATTON

Did she indeed? And what did you say?

COURTENAY

That doesn't matter.
But in describing you, I suddenly saw myself
And the failure that I am.
You know, Cory, one can get so used to the mask
Which we think we are,
That when we see ourselves as we are,
We do not recognize the grin.
It is as though I'd found all my life was sleep,
And what I thought were dreams was I awake.
In private nightmares are we each confined
Stalking the shadow of our own despair.

STRATTON

(Gets up and looks into the mirror)

You mean that self-deception can be such
That reality appears illusion;
And that this reflection might be the image
and this image the reflection?

(He turns suddenly and breaks off.)

Anyhow such speculation is irrelevant,
Or, at any rate, uncomfortable.

COURTENAY

Uncomfortable, yes; but about my failure there is no illusion.
I remember when you offered me this living twenty years ago,
—More out of friendship than discretion;

And, do you think I've forgotten the innumerable incidents

Of your giving and my taking?

And the imperceptible way I've drawn myself into your family
like an insidious ivy leeching on a tree?

You have given so much to me

That there is nothing of myself left;

They say a wise man knows himself.

Idiots! I tell you, Cory, self-knowledge is sheer suicide.

STRATTON

Don't lacerate yourself like this, John. The selfishness was
mine. I offered you this living because I wanted your friendship
here and . . .

COURTENAY

And? And you believed I would make a good rural parson.

Fill the church again, farm my own glebe

And God knows what else I wasn't going to do!

But here I am, after twenty years,

With the church as dead as a museum;

And myself, like a bored curator, lecturing to the indifferent
pews.

I suppose the only justification for my life is that I am writing
yours:

The patient accumulation of biographical data,
Compiling irrelevant appendices . . .
My future consists of nothing more than burrowing into your
past.
Marsden despises me, and you pity me or put up with me.
Oh I know what they say!
I've a good mind to resign . . .

STRATTON

Again? Why? Just because some of the people go to chapel in-
stead of church
And most of them go to neither?
That's no reflection against you; it's the age we live in.
Because the tide engulfs us, it doesn't mean that we are weak
But that it is strong. It's stronger than I; it's stronger than you.
And like the river, is flowing away from us both.

We who care for tradition and the past,
Are as children making paper boats
For the inevitable flood to wash them all away.

You and I began, as we all begin:
Thinking ourselves ahead of our time
And believing we can lead and it will follow,
But before we are fifty we find that time has led us
And we're almost too tired to follow.

COURTENAY

It's not the emptiness of my church which worries me,
Nor the draught of village gossip
Nor the untidy loneliness of being an eccentric parson;
Those are little deaths which we manage to survive.
Oh, if we only died once, Cory, and did not drain away
Into indifference which is resignation,
Dying by degrees in minute disappointments,
Enfeebled by jealousy on the rack of resentment,
And embittered and broken, not through lack of love
But complete indifference to it.

Twenty years ago, I came here with my enthusiasms
Burning like a gorse bush,

And a faith that shot through my soul like a star. ✓
Yet now, when I kneel by the dead, I cannot console the living.
And I have lost my faith. No, not because any tragedy has
 blinded me
Nor arguments bewildered me;
I have lost it in the same manner as a man misplaces
An old tobacco pouch.
My trouble is not that I have failed to achieve my ambitions
But that I have forgotten what they were.
But you won't understand that. May I have a drink?
 (He pours one.)

STRATTON

(Slightly exasperated)

Why must you always run upon your conscience as though it
 were a sword,
And make me your second in a duel
In which you're both challenger and challenged?
—Sometimes failure is success, John
 And sometimes, success is failure.
How can anyone measure a man's achievements
Except by his intentions?
And by that, who is not a failure?
For the world cannot see with what slow certainty
Life makes us pay its price
In an endless chain of petty sacrifice.

COURTENAY

(Bitterly) How typical of you not to judge,
But plead for me as if I were your client!
I'm sick to death of your smug tolerance,
Yet if you knew the facts, you'd drop this case,
Not plead for it, but judge it.
You do know, don't you?

STRATTON

What? That you drink more than I do?
To judge you for that, I must first feel your thirst.

COURTENAY

No, Cory, not that . . .

STRATTON

That you spend your stipend before you have it?
And owe a tradesman for something he himself's not paid for?

COURTENAY

Not that either . . .

STRATTON

Well then, what is all this about?

COURTENAY

And you will not—judge me?

STRATTON

Judge? What do you mean? Besides, you know I've already refused to do that professionally. Why should I begin now?

COURTENAY

Yes, why do you refuse that appointment?

STRATTON

You know very well.

COURTENAY

Why?

STRATTON

(*Rather pompously*) Those who judge must be willing to condemn. And, I suspect that it's safer to defend our friends than judge them. . . .

COURTENAY

And safer still, when you've never been judged by your friends!
It's easy to forgive when you've never known the humiliation of
| having been forgiven!
You're so sure of yourself
You even dare make a principle of tolerance?

STRATTON

Tolerance? What are you driving at?

COURTENAY

Yes, I will even make your precious tolerance disappear.

STRATTON

My dear John, tell me—whatever it is.

COURTENAY

Oh, don't worry, I haven't raped one of my parishioners or murdered your gamekeeper.

STRATTON

Well, what's on your mind?

COURTENAY

You want to know? I warn you.

To know one's friends as they are
Is almost as dangerous as know oneself as one is;
For in me you may catch a glimpse of your own reflection——

STRATTON

Well, tell me what it is. Perhaps I can help.

COURTENAY

This: I hate you.

I hate you for being what you are.

I hate you for being what I'm not.

For your success measures my failure,

Your generosity, my ingratitude.

For twenty years you have nourished my hate with your love

Till I have become the nightmare that I am,

Loathing the thing you are— or think you are.

Why do you look surprised?

Do you think men like their friends for their virtues? | ✓

No! It's their weaknesses which endear them to us.

And you've no weaknesses—have you?

Well, no more than those which you yourself might mention
generously,

To make an interview more colourful.

But as to the rest,

as to those shadows which define a man and not merely
describe his manner

to those, you do not admit, do you? and why should you?

For, as your wife knows, you are a faithful husband;

As your son knows, you are a loving father;

As this village knows, you are a good landlord;

As the whole country knows, you are a great man.

But what do I know you as?

STRATTON

It seems you've already told me—

Anyhow what precisely are you trying to do?

COURTENAY

No more than make you face the reality of your success
In the same way as you've rubbed my nose in my own failure.

STRATTON

And just how have I done that?

COURTENAY

By pumping up your own damned self-esteem with my self-
respect.

STRATTON

Indeed? By what means?

COURTENAY

By turning my frailties into vices

And making my vices seem like sins.

How? By nursing the seedlings with your indulgence

As they grew under your broad-minded tolerance

Till they bloomed as a sin meriting your forgiveness.

And it is that which you would pluck for a buttonhole.
 You're too much of an epicure to deny yourself the piquancy of
 charity,
 And there's nothing quite so succulent is there—
 As the flavour of one's own generosity?
 But for twenty years you've dined at my expense!
 Yes, yes, we all think we're being very noble when we forgive
 our friends,
 But it's only those things which we can't forgive that are worth
 forgiving.
 The rest is all self-nourishment.
 And as I know it's quite another thing to be the person whose
 failings are always explained away—
 quite good humouredly, of course.
 A man soon learns to carry the weight of his own sins.
 It's only when other people forgive them
 That they become so intolerably heavy.

STRATTON

That's a strange thing for a parson to say, isn't it?

COURTENAY

Is it? No, a parson sees that men do much more than hate their
 God—
 They positively ignore Him.
 But I cannot ignore you . . . everywhere I look I see you;
 This village is you; if I pray in my own church I
 Kneel to your crest,
 With ten generations of you around me,
 All looking as self-satisfied in their death,
 As you are in your life!
 And, if I go for a drink, I must even drink in the "Stratton Arms"
 No, it's easier to ignore one's God, than to ignore one's patrons! /

STRATTON

You're merely . . .

COURTENAY

Yes, I am jealous. Jealous of that blind love with which Maria
sees you
And thus hides you from yourself.

STRATTON

John, we'll leave Maria out of this!

COURTENAY

But will you?

STRATTON

Will I? What do you mean?

COURTENAY

That those who love us are as a conscience to us.
Perhaps that's why we turn against them—as I have against you?
And so will Maria too—suffer at your hands
When you dare to know yourself as I know myself.
All of us end by hurting those who love us.
For it is their forgiveness that makes us feel our failure.
That's why we break their hearts
Mistaking their's for our own—
Our own which holds only self-love,
Self-love which suffocates our soul.

STRATTON

(Again sympathetic and detached, unaware that COURTENAY's last lines apply to himself, he mistakes his friend's prophecy for a piece of typical self-pity.)

John, I'm sorry. But why must you destroy yourself like this?—

...

COURTENAY

(Laughing at him.)

There you go again: sorry for me—you should be sorry for yourself.

The difference between us is: my self-knowledge leads to self-
pity

And your lack of it puts you on a pedestal of self-esteem.

There's some hope for those who admit they are hopeless

For men can only be made to kneel

When shame or fear rests its hand on their shoulders

But, of course, you're an exception—you're most devout, aren't
you—

Kneeling daily to that God you worship

The jealous God which is your jealous self?

Your whole life is self-sacrifice, isn't it,

A sacrifice to the graven image of your own reflection,

With ritualistic genuflection to your reputation. ✓

There the great landlord sits owning acres and acres of fertile
pride.

But you're safe enough till you see

Your true image behind the glass:

As you will when the loving father's thwarted,

When the faithful husband's tempted.

Then what a metamorphosis there'll be!

And what a flood will flow when all the barriers of self-
deception

Crumble before the weight of your desires.

I warn you, Cory:

When an idol falls and that idol is yourself, you fall, too

And are broken, crushed by self-adulation.

For the end of pride is self-destruction!

(He goes to the door.)

—Or will the brilliant barrister come to his own defence

And argue his way out with words? I wonder . . .

Ah well, all offal is meat to the faithful biographer.

(COURTENAY goes out.)

(STRATTON remains staring into the mirror. The music of the Prologue is heard again.)

STRATTON

What am I doing?

I am remembering a tune I have never heard

I am recognizing a face I have never seen.
And I am talking to myself.

/ Looking into a mirror is like visiting a man in prison.
But which is the prisoner and which is the visitor?
Or are we both imprisoned in each other's eyes?

I stare: you smile—
But who is staring and who is smiled at?
Which of these two men is me?
Am I as faithful as I think? No man is faithful in his thought . . .
Am I a loving father? Yes. Surely there is no temptation there.
Is there?
No, not in a normal man, as I am.

But how can I know myself? Since it is plain that I did not even
know my friend?

Whose hate is so intimate that I had mistaken it for love.

| We open our hearts to our friends, so that they know just where
to wound us—

Why does he hate me so?

Am I the fake or failure he finds himself to be?

No! Poor John. His loneliness drives him to desperation.

And in desperation he'd destroy

The happiness I have, in order to enjoy

The friendship which he'd give again

If he could reduce me to his same despair . . .

| Friends like us for our misfortunes,

| When the weight of our unhappiness alleviates their own . . .

| But isn't that what John said? Didn't he say:

'It is our weaknesses which endear us to our friends.'

What sort of barrister am I, who now merely repeats the Prosecutor's words?

Yes, and didn't he also say that I would try to argue my way out
with words?

(*He goes over to the fireplace and there catches sight of his portrait.*)

Few of us are what we are painted to be?

Is that a true portrait?

Or is this a true reflection?

Or am I as John sees me?
Which of these three masks is me?

It seems that Satan has only to make us doubt ourselves,
For us to be already damned . . .

(He returns to mirror.)

What am I doing?
I am staring at myself,
I am talking to myself.
Am I uncertain of myself?

(Pause.)

Yes, all day I've been trying to forget

What I dared not remember—

All day I've been trying to remember

What I could not forget.

Like a shadow avoiding the object which cast it ✓

Like a diver groping beneath the deep water. . . .

There was a woman's face. But whose face?

And the hands which strangled her. But whose hands?

Then the silent scream:

And I the dreamer watching the dream.

Yes, now I remember . . .

But do dreams reveal realities?

Am I capable of strangling a woman with my hands?

Was that me? Is that my real nature behind the mask?

John says it is. How shall I know?

Dare I remove the mask and look?

Am I that dream

or, or

Am I this portrait, the man of the world that the world knows?—

The eminent K.C. with a reputation for integrity,

An immaculate marionette. Am I no more than that? ↙

It's a brave man who asks himself this question,

Then dares to find the answer.

And what is the answer?

The answer is: not only have I triumphed over my nature

But more, much more . . . I have refined it,
Till my senses are all restrained by reason.
Isn't that the answer?

Yes, that is the answer! That is the answer!

(Enter MARIA. STRATTON, unaware of her entrance, still stares into the mirror. Pause.)

MARIA

Is anything wrong, darling? I thought you were still talking to John?

STRATTON

So I was.

MARIA

But where is he?

STRATTON

Gone.

MARIA

Admit, my love, you were talking to yourself.

STRATTON

No, I was answering John. But he didn't stop to hear it.

MARIA

But how unlike you. . . .

STRATTON

Is it?

MARIA

Darling, you don't look yourself.

STRATTON

I don't look myself? *(Turning to mirror again)* And what else could a man see in a mirror but himself?

MARIA

But you look as if you've seen a ghost.

STRATTON

So I have. What are we but ghosts, ghosts haunting our own reflection?

MARIA

Come and sit down, Cory, you're tired.

STRATTON

No I'm not tired.

MARIA

Then what is it? You're strange. You usually enjoy an hour alone with John. Why, sometimes I think he understands you better than I do.

STRATTON

But you do love me, don't you?

MARIA

Darling, of course . . . and so does John.

STRATTON

Does he?

MARIA

You know he does.


STRATTON

Oh, yes, we're the best of friends—

MARIA

What's wrong? Has he been worrying you? Poor John, he's such a lonely, pathetic creature. . . .

STRATTON

That he turns against the few friends he has
In order to make his loneliness more extreme. 

MARIA

Tell me what's wrong. Has he upset you?

STRATTON

{ People like him cling to their complaints and aggravate them
Merely to make our sympathy appear inadequate—for self-pity
is their pleasure.
They suckle their own thirst for failure,
Like a wet nurse indulging in self-nourishment.
Nothing annoys them so much as our relief.

MARIA

Cory, I've never heard you talk like this before. As you know,
John has always enjoyed watching your success.

STRATTON

Yes, in quiet anticipation of my fall.

MARIA

Why are you so bitter? What happened between you?

STRATTON

He tried to reduce me to what he is—a pitiful target of self-
imagined, self-inflicted fears.

MARIA

But aren't we all?

STRATTON

No. And if we were, we do not publish our private dreams,
or try to drag our friends into our public nightmare.

MARIA

What do you mean?

STRATTON

I mean, John hates this house and everything it stands for.

Somehow, the children's engagement has nailed its continuity to his mind.

He's no friend. He'd like to destroy us, our love, our family, and all he has not got himself.

Just like a defeated tyrant, he'd level all the world to rubble |
Merely to lessen the measure of his fall.

MARIA

But why are you now frightened?

All this we knew before, though never mentioned.

Are you no longer sure of us, our love, the children and all we have

—Which is so much that others' envy must be part of it?

Where's your tolerance?

STRATTON

My—"precious" tolerance?

MARIA

Yes, precious, for we've always valued it.

STRATTON

We were mistaken.

John's shown me that.

Friends are valuable in this: they shew us where we're vulnerable

We should be grateful to our friends when they reveal their hate

For hate is challenging and strengthening.

It is when they deceive us with their love

That they weaken us most with false security.

MARIA

My dear, I'm sorry——

STRATTON

Don't pity me. I'm not weak like John. He challenged me to judge him: I will. More, I've now changed my mind; I've decided to accept Manning's offer.

For if I can judge one man, I may as well judge any other.

MARIA

What? Even after refusing to go to Nuremberg and try those men? Why, you said. . . .

STRATTON

(*Quickly*) What did I say?

MARIA

You said that the only man who could judge them would be one who himself had known the temptation of their power. You said it was better to defend a man than to judge him.

STRATTON

Did I? Can I defend someone I do not know?
I thought I knew John. I did not. Can I know any man?
No! Then how can I defend him?

MARIA

I don't understand you. This decision turns our whole family tradition inside out.

(*She looks up towards the portrait of Sir Cory Stratton, 1603-1659. STRATTON goes and stands in front of the portrait.*)

STRATTON

Yes, that shadow has been cast too long over this house and the only way to remove it is for me to accept this challenge from the past. This family tradition has become a tyranny. Why should my career be thwarted because he condemned his King to death? Why should I be deprived of my future because of the tyranny and mistakes of the past?

MARIA

In a family there is no past.

STRATTON

What do you mean?

MARIA

The ambitions of one generation can step out from a portrait and become the temptations of another.

STRATTON

Some of us fail by succumbing to our temptations—others succeed by not having any.

MARIA

That sounds more like John than you. Your family traditions are not a restriction. They are the experience of the past. And our freedom lies, not in defying them, but in respecting them.

STRATTON

Each of us must make the past live again, and accept its challenge. How can I know my strength except by daring to judge, as he did?

(He points to the portrait and holds the position.)

MARIA

I do not know. Perhaps we are strongest, not when we reach for our future, but when we kneel to our past. And how often have I heard you say "the only justice is mercy, and tolerance is the only moral law". What has changed you?

STRATTON

Anyhow, I have decided!

(MARIA glances up at the portrait then suddenly puts her hands to her eyes. STRATTON goes to her.)

What's wrong?

MARIA

I don't know. It was as if that shadow *(she points to the portrait)* fell across my eyes.

STRATTON

You mean you don't approve?

MARIA

I didn't say so.

STRATTON

No, but your eyes did; and for a moment they refused to look upon this man you do not wish me to become. Does my decision make you love me less?

MARIA

Love you less?

No. It merely bewilders me.

Love has no need to understand.

A woman does not love with her reason, but in spite of it.

I do not love you for what you are to other men,

But for what you are to me.

If you turned basketmaker

I suppose I'd turn reedcutter—

And if you become a judge, then I a judge's wife.

STRATTON

Then you don't approve?

MARIA

Darling, is it my fault if I don't understand? Tell me what made you make this decision? You must have had some good reason.

STRATTON

(Pause.)

There are two: Katherine and Cory.

MARIA

What's this to do with them?

STRATTON

(*More relaxed*) Everything. They are my only reasons. If I retire to the bench, Cory can eventually take silk. My practice will become his, my name is his. He's followed my footsteps so far: now he may as well step into my shoes. It's not right for me to stand in his way.

MARIA

But Cory doesn't think you do.

STRATTON

He would. When a man marries, he doesn't want his father looking over his shoulder. Nor will Katherine like——

MARIA

. . . me?

STRATTON

The only present we can make to her is to let her make her home here, where we began. Kirnstone will belong to them one day. They should start their life together here, as we did, with the same freedom. If I become a Judge, then, we can move up to London and they can begin their life together, here, alone, as soon as they return from their honeymoon. Don't you agree?

MARIA

(Relieved) Need you ask? *(She goes to window back stage.)*
How happy they are!
Just as we were, thirty years ago.
It's strange how our children's lives
Echo our own.
Thirty years ago, your father and mother stood
Where we stand. . . .

STRATTON

. . . and don't you remember, when we came in from the garden, she gave you that ring.

MARIA

Yes, I must give it to Katherine.
Now imperceptibly we, the actors, have become the observers.

STRATTON

And the roundabout's revolved again.

MARIA

Darling. I'm sorry. I should have guessed your real reason.

STRATTON

(Quietly) You mean you don't believe me?

MARIA

Of course, it's so typical of you to think of Cory and Katherine.

STRATTON

And do you mind?

MARIA

No, giving to them
Is not taking from us,
But adding to what we are.
For a mother it's easy, nature makes us give with such willingness,
We can never call it sacrifice. But for you, it's different.
You will no longer be the great man with a brilliant son
You will become a brilliant man's old father.

STRATTON

And I shall gain in pride.
Besides, what could I lose by giving up that part of my life
Which has kept me so much from you who are my life?

MARIA

Is your love no less?

STRATTON

No less.

When I am awake
You are asleep in my heart.
And when I sleep
You wake up in my dream.

When I am walking
I am walking to you:
And if I sit down,
It is because you are resting.

When I am laughing
I am laughing through your eyes
And when you are crying
You are crying through my tears.

No, it is no less.

MARIA

That's all I wanted to know . . .

(She kisses him on the cheek. Pause.)

I must get back to the children. I promised Katherine to give her a game. But you stay in, darling, and rest. Here are the papers—you haven't looked at one for days.

STRATTON

(Casually) Anything in them?

MARIA

(Casually) Nothing out of the ordinary; But just sit and rest. We shan't be long.

(MARIA goes out. STRATTON picks up a newspaper and reads to himself. Then slowly he lowers the paper and walks across to the mirror and staring into it repeats)

"The body of an unknown woman was found in the early hours of this morning. Death had been caused by strangulation. A man was found still kneeling by the body when the police arrived. He has been taken into custody and formally charged."

(The music of the Prologue is heard again.)

CURTAIN

ACT ONE

Scene II

A Criminal Court consisting of a Judge's bench, stage centre, behind which a drop curtain displays the Royal Coat of Arms. Below the bench is a table at which the Clerks of the Court sit immediately beneath the Judge: the Counsel for the Defence and the Prosecutor for the Crown are at the same table on their respective sides.

When the prisoner is referred to, he is seen standing in one of the ordinary boxes properly belonging to the auditorium. His features remain concealed throughout his trial and are only recognizable when he stands finally to receive his sentence.

The audience is addressed as if it were the Jury, the Foreman of which sits also in the auditorium either in a box or in the front row of the stalls opposite to the prisoner.

When the CURTAIN RISES the closing speech for the Crown is being concluded.

PROSECUTOR

Gentlemen of the Jury, I have put the case for the Crown before you as briefly as possible, but to sum up, the facts are these: the body of an unidentified woman was found lying in the gutter on the 1st June. She had been strangled. The prisoner who stands before you is charged with her wilful murder. And it is for you to decide whether this man strangled that woman. No other consideration is relevant. Do not act upon anything against the Prisoner unless you are satisfied as reasonable men beyond all reasonable doubt. But if you are so satisfied, determine that this horrible murder shall not go unpunished. You are here to do your duty. But from that duty a Jury of the City of London dare not, and will not, shrink.

MR. JUSTICE STRATTON

Gentlemen of the Jury, we have now reached the final stages of this unique and important case, the stage of my directing you on the facts and on the Law; and for you to consider the evidence which has been placed before you.

Gentlemen, you know what the crime of murder is. It means the causing of the death of another intentionally and by wilful act. And that is the charge against the Prisoner. It is for you to decide whether this man is guilty of committing that crime.

Now what are the facts before you? They are these:

In the early hours of the morning of 1st June, the body of a woman was found lying in the gutter. She had died of manual strangulation. You have heard the medical evidence from Dr. Salter testifying to this and I must remind you that the Defence have not questioned it, nor have they suggested that the woman died of natural causes or was murdered by any other agency. Both the Crown and the Defence agree in this. The question is, therefore, whose hands strangled this woman? That is for you to decide. And what have you to consider? When the body was first found, a man was seen kneeling beside it. That man was the Prisoner. The Crown have from the first stated their case and adhered to it, and that is the case which you have got to try. You need not consider any other. It involves only one question: did this man kill that woman? Were his hands those that clasped the neck and strangled the life from that woman? The onus is on the Crown to prove that they were. Have they done so? Let me repeat the evidence which the Crown has brought before you.

There can be no doubt, I think, that the Prisoner is the man who was found kneeling beside the murdered woman. Several witnesses have identified him and he himself has not denied it. You have heard that at that time he showed neither grief nor remorse, but knelt there staring into the still open eyes of the woman whose neck bore the marks of the fingers and the print of the thumb. When questioned as he knelt by the body he made only one remark. It was this: "*Great love is a tyranny like sanity.*" Since making this somewhat enigmatical comment, the Prisoner has remained completely silent. He refused to make

any statement when arrested; and, as you know, he has not opened his lips throughout his trial. Indeed he would not even answer the question whether he was guilty or not guilty, and though his Defence pleaded the latter, on his behalf, yet we have not heard the Prisoner's denial from his own lips. The Crown has, as you know, shown great patience in questioning him, but he has made no answer and has even refused to reply when his own Counsel tried to examine him. Not only has he remained silent, he has kept his face concealed throughout the trial by holding his hands before him, as he is now, staring through his fingers like a man through prison bars. The Crown has suggested to you that this position which the Prisoner maintains is as significant as his silence, and that he holds his hands before him because they are the hands which strangled the woman, which fact even his own lips will not deny. But I must direct you to distinguish between conjecture and reasonable conclusions deduced from reliable evidence.

Which brings me to the salient fact of this extraordinary case, which is, that even after the most exhaustive inquiries, the Crown cannot ascertain who the murdered woman was, nor who the Prisoner is. And in spite of the wide publicity which this case has received, it is peculiar that no relative or friend has come forward to identify either the Prisoner or the victim.

You have heard reliable evidence in which the Prisoner's mental condition was described as "simple amnesia" or loss of memory. Indeed the Defence claims that their client has no knowledge of who he is, where he lived or by what chain of events he was brought to kneel in the gutter beside that strangled woman on 1st June. We are, as it were, dealing with two fictitious characters, but with this difference; one now lies in a nameless grave and the other still stands before you.

Somewhat naturally, the Defence has made much of the fact that nobody knows who the murdered woman was. But nobody has dared to suggest that since she had no identity, she had no existence, within the meaning of the Law, and was therefore beyond its protection. It is for you to consider whether this man killed that woman; the Law is impersonal; in its eyes their identity is irrelevant, and therefore that question need not, and must not, distract you.

Now, Gentlemen, in dealing with this case you have to consider in what degree the prisoner's proximity to the body at the time it was discovered, his behaviour by its side, and his attitude since in this Court, constitute mere circumstantial evidence of actual guilt. And you have to decide whether the Defence is right in suggesting that since neither we, nor the Prisoner, know who the murdered woman was, he could have no motive for killing her. You must ask yourself: if men are capable of killing those whom they love, are they not also capable of murdering those whom they do not even know? Can a man love a woman whom he does not know? I suggest we have all literature to prove it. But can he love an unknown woman when he does not know who he is himself? The Defence has suggested that few of us know who we are and none of us know whom we love; and that no man or woman is, until in love they are identified. But I must warn you that such poetical speculations should take no place in your minds to-day. The Law cannot recognize poetry.

You must decide, too, in what degree the Prisoner's lack of memory constitutes insanity. He can remember nothing of his past, nor does he seem concerned with his future. But does that constitute insanity, or even abnormality? The Defence claims that he could have no reason for murdering this woman, but does lack of motive imply lack of reason? How often do men forget what they dare not remember, and act for no reason but from despair?

But, Gentlemen, against these somewhat obscure speculations which before the Law are irrelevant, the Crown has placed one fact before you. It is this. The Prisoner's hand fitted the marks on this strangled woman's neck as though they were his glove. Plaster casts of both the neck and the hand will be given to your Foreman before you retire. And with this evidence held before all others in your mind, you will recall the Prisoner's only comment as he knelt by the body: "*Great love is a tyrant like sanity.*" Your verdict will interpret that statement. It is not for you to decide whether this man knew that woman, loved that woman, or hated that woman; or, that since she had no identity she had no existence. The law is impersonal and her identity is irrelevant; also her relationship to the Prisoner is irrelevant; she

may not even have known him as has been suggested; she may have been his sweetheart or she may have been his wife. . . .

(On this word STRATTON pauses very briefly; he glances at his own hands folded before him then continues.)

. . . It is for you to decide whether he strangled the life from her with the hands with which he now hides his face. And if you think that this man committed that inhuman crime, you will not hesitate to do your duty, whoever the prisoner is, or whoever the strangled woman was.

The Jury will now retire to consider its verdict.

(At the conclusion of LORD JUSTICE STRATTON's charge to the Jury, the CLERK of the Court hands the plaster casts of the hand and neck to the FOREMAN of the Jury. Immediately after which there is a Blackout on the stage signifying that the Jury has retired. A few seconds' music. Lights.)

The PRISONER stands, still hiding his face.)

CLERK OF THE COURT

Gentlemen, have you agreed upon your verdict?

FOREMAN OF JURY

We have.

CLERK

Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty of wilful murder?

FOREMAN

We find the prisoner guilty of wilful murder.

CLERK

And that is the verdict of you all?

FOREMAN

Yes.

CLERK

Prisoner at the Bar, you stand convicted of the crime of wilful murder; have you anything to say why the Court should not give you judgment of death according to Law?

(Pause.)

Do you wish to say anything before the sentence of this Court is passed upon you?

(There is no answer. The USHER proclaims silence.)

STRATTON

Whoever you are, you have been convicted of the most foul and brutal murder. I have now to pass upon you the sentence of this Court which is:

“May you be taken out of this Court and may you be blind-folded

And a rope placed round your neck and may you hang until you’re dead.

And may your body be buried within the precincts of the prison

And may God have mercy on your soul. . . .”

(The PRISONER slowly lowers his hands. For a second he stares at the Judge: the Judge back at the prisoner. Slowly STRATTON raises his hands and assumes the position which the Prisoner previously held. There is a brief blackout during which STRATTON dispenses with his robes so that when the light comes on again he appears as the Prisoner, wearing the Prisoner’s clothes and holding his hands in the same position as the latter did throughout his trial. Whilst the Prisoner in the dock now appears as STRATTON and wears the full Judge’s robes. The remaining dialogue is all spoken by STRATTON.)

Do you wish to say anything before the sentence of this Court is passed upon you?

(Pause.)

STRATTON

I must warn you: when an idol falls, and that idol is yourself, you fall, too.

(Pause.)

You stand accused of pride. You mean belief in myself? ✓

You stand accused of believing in yourself and not in God.
And that is the sin of pride.
You have put your faith in human reason, in science, in logic.
You have put your hope in human progress thinking human
nature can be restrained by human law
This is the modern heresy: the sin is pride.
You are accused of deifying yourself and denying your God
You are convicted of relying on your own strength and not
God's strength
And therefore you are condemned to know your weakness,
to know yourself as you are
for once any man knows that
what place has he for pride? .
You will find all men are
Born to appetite, to suffer from desire.
May your inarticulate, blind appetites
Now crawl out from their forgotten dreams
May you be cursed with passions which no nightmare can con-
tain;
May you feel pain, the most pitiless pain of all;
The pain of being man.
May you lust when the object of your lust stands before you;
May you hate when the object of your hate stands before you.
For when gratification is possible
Your temptation will be more terrible. . . .

(Pause.)

Now is the Judge, the Prisoner; and the Jury is condemned.

(Music.)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Kirnstone Manor: the same set as Scene I, Act One. But the room has been slightly rearranged: there are different covers on the cushions and chairs. The flower bowls are filled with beech leaves and Michaelmas daisies.

It is an autumn afternoon on the day following the Trial, Act One, Scene II.

When the CURTAIN RISES, MARIA is alone: she is waiting. She moves a bowl of flowers: and then, after looking at it critically, replaces it exactly where it stood before. She goes to the window (back stage) and stares out as if looking for something in the distance. She returns and straightens a cover on a chair.

The clock strikes the half-hour. MARIA goes to the window again. After a few moments, she suddenly sees what she has been looking for: and then, crossing the room to the fireplace, she rings the bell.

The BUTLER appears.

MARIA

They're coming! Have the doors open ready. But remember: don't say I'm here.

BUTLER

Very good, my lady. *(He turns to go.)*

MARIA

And, Lambourne, if my son should ask you if everything is all right here, say it is. We must not worry them as soon as they return.

BUTLER

I understand, my lady. *(He withdraws.)*

(*MARIA is tense with happy anticipation. Suddenly she notices a photograph of STRATTON which stands on a side table. Hurriedly she removes it from its silver frame, replacing it with a photograph of her son which she takes from the drawer.*)

Enter KATHERINE and CORY.)

CORY

Mother! This is a surprise (*They embrace.*)

MARIA

How lovely you look, Katherine. (*They embrace.*) I needn't ask if you're happy.

KATHERINE

Is it so obvious?

CORY

It's wonderful seeing you here. We thought you were in London with Father.

MARIA

No, I've been enjoying myself here for a few days; changing things round. I didn't want Katherine to come back from her honeymoon to find the same old curtains staring at her. I wanted you both to feel that it was new enough to be your own.

KATHERINE

Darling, how thoughtful of you! It looks beautiful, I hardly recognized it.

MARIA .

Oh! I don't know about that. Old rooms are like old faces: it's almost impossible to alter their expression.

KATHERINE

You've even changed the photographs. Look, Cory, I've never seen this one of you—it is you, isn't it?

MARIA

Come, Katherine, they're not all that alike.

KATHERINE

Aren't they?

MARIA

(*Going to table drawer*) No; look.

KATHERINE

Yes, that is older and this is younger; but anybody would say they were photographs of the same man taken at different times. . . .

CORY

Darling, how kind of you to do all this for us.

MARIA

Not at all. You didn't think your father and I were going to leave all our treasures behind, did you? So I'm taking all our bits and pieces up to London to-morrow; we'll need them there.

CORY

To-morrow? Must you? Katherine, can't we . . .

MARIA

Nonsense. I only stayed to see you in. But perhaps Katherine will ask us down for Christmas. . . .

KATHERINE

Why, of course.

CORY

Won't Father come down before then?

MARIA

No, Cory, he thinks it best to let you settle in alone.

CORY

But . . .

MARIA

Kirnstone is yours now, Cory. You must manage the estate yourself. Marsden's been phoning your father all day. . . .

CORY

What about?

MARIA

. . . Oh, nothing to worry about. But as I was saying, your father refused to decide anything and told Marsden he must wait till you returned.

CORY

But surely he will come down for the shoot?

MARIA

No, Cory, you must make your own party.

CORY

This is absurd.

KATHERINE

Why, darling, I thought you were looking forward to having a free hand. All through our honeymoon you've talked of nothing else but the improvements you were going to make, the cottages you were going to build and the dredger you were going to get from Holland to lower the bed of the river. . . .

CORY

Yes, but . . .

KATHERINE

And you'll see your father when you go to London.

CORY

It will seem strange here without him. How is he?

MARIA

Very well. And longing to see you both.

KATHERINE

And how does he like being a judge?

MARIA

(The question disturbs her: she goes over to the window) More than I thought he would, but . . .

(Pause.)

CORY

(Sympathetically) But what, Mother?

(Pause.)

MARIA

Nothing. Nothing at all.

I was thinking of all the hours I've spent standing at this window.

And looking at these trees but never seeing them;

And listening to these rooks but never hearing them;

And watching that endless river flow forever.

It's strange how we never see a place till we're leaving it,—

And then how indifferent it is to our going.

CORY

You don't want to go, do you?

MARIA

On the contrary, I do.

This view is meaningless to me now,—

In the past it has meant: my waiting for his coming. But now
your father's not coming and I'm leaving here,

These trees mean as little to me as I do to them.

Affection is the only focus for our eyes

And we are blind unless we're loved. | ✓

You, too, will treasure this view, and think it beautiful;

But it is not beautiful, it is your love which is beautiful.

(She turns round.)

May you two be as happy here as we were!

(*Pause.*)

CORY

Mother, why don't you and father take a holiday? You could go, now the trial is over.

MARIA

(*Nervously*) Over?

CORY

Yes, didn't you know?

MARIA

No, I haven't followed it; nor has your father mentioned it.

CORY

That's strange. I read his summing-up in *The Times* this morning.

MARIA

(*Looking up at STRATTON's portrait*) And what was the verdict?

KATHERINE

(*Oblivious to MARIA's inexplicable distress*) Guilty!

What was it your father said?

"Whoever you are you have been convicted of the most foul and brutal murder.

I have now to pass on you the sentence of this court:

Which is:

MARIA

(*Going back to window*) Yes?

CORY

(*Seeing his mother's distress*) No, Katherine. . . .

KATHERINE

"May you be taken out of this Court and may you be blind-folded

And a rope placed round your neck and may you hang until you're dead.

And may your body be buried within the precincts of the prison
And may God have mercy on your soul. . . ."

(MARIA turns round. Pause. *The evening sun streams through the window.*)

MARIA

How dark it is. Cory, turn on the lights.

CORY

(*Going to his mother*) Dark? But, Mother, the sun's still shining.

MARIA

Is it?

(CORY leads his mother to a chair.)

Yes, I can see it now; now I can see you.

It was nothing. It must have been a shadow.

Sometimes a shadow falls across the mind

And seeing it, our eyes seem blind

To the world which is without—all substance without meaning.

I often wonder under what duress

Our minds return from wandering in absentmindedness

And through what dark valleys they have roamed before our
vacancy draws them home.

Sometimes in such moments of abstraction when we gaze out
of a window and stare at a familiar view

Or when we stand watching the flood waters flow under a little
bridge

We seem to look beyond the object of our sight,

And in blind vision see our destination: night.

KATHERINE

(*Dryly*)

Yes, I know what you mean:

The feeling that one's been
Where one has not been. . . .

MARIA

No, it was nothing.

CORY

Look, here's Captain Marsden running up the drive. . . .

(*MARIA rises.*)

Is anything wrong, Mother? Is there?

MARIA

Yes, Cory . . .

CORY

The river? Oh God, why didn't you tell me?

MARIA

There was nothing you could do.

(*Enter CAPTAIN MARSDEN; he is out of breath and dishevelled.*
The flood can be heard rising in intensity through the scene.)

MARSDEN

It's through!

CORY

Where?

MARSDEN

Just above Crenham Mill. Woolsery meadows are under
water. And the whole village is threatened. . . .

MARIA

What!

CORY

When did it happen?

MARSDEN

Not an hour ago; and now the river has left its bed
And like a mad serpent that's lost its skin
It's raging where it will. . . .

(CORY *makes to go.*)

MARSDEN

There's nothing you can do.
There's nothing any of us can do
But wait till it spends itself.

MARIA

But the mill?

MARSDEN

Gone. I suppose it got the worst of ten thousand tons.
The water just piled up against its old foundations
Then swept the whole place away
As if it were a bundle of brushwood.

KATHERINE

And the miller?

MARIA

And his wife?

MARSDEN

Oh, they got away. They scrambled out somehow.

CORY

And is all gone? Is there nothing we can do?

MARSDEN

Nothing. It's all on its way down to the sea.
All, except the pathetic clutter which people cling to
When all they have is washed away . . .

MARIA

Yes, it's strange what people cling to
When all they have is threatened.
But where have they gone? They must come here—mustn't
they, Katherine?

KATHERINE

Why, of course.

MARSDEN

They're all right; John took them to the vicarage, my lady.

CORY

But surely there's something we can do?

MARSDEN

Nothing; but pray it doesn't rain any more.

God knows we've had enough of it, not a dry day since 21st August.

It was last Sunday that she first started to look angry and rise above flood level.

Then the culvert at Underhill got washed away,—that was on Tuesday.

On Wednesday I phoned Sir Cory and we opened the sluices at Linton.

—that eased things a bit.

Then yesterday, she looked as if she were falling;

But then it rained all day and it rained all night.

And by this morning it was piling up at Crenham Bank so that nothing could hold it.

CORY

But if it's through at Crenham—the whole village and every farm in the valley is threatened.

MARSDEN

I tell you it's hopeless.

KATHERINE

Can't anything be done?

CORY

Mother, didn't it break through in Grandfather's time?

MARIA

Yes, but that was further up the valley.

CORY

Why can't we do as he did?

KATHERINE

What, Cory?

CORY

Blow up the Kirnstone Lock.

MARSDEN

What! If you do that you'll flood the whole Park and all the western pastures . . . you may even get it in here, too.

CORY

But it would save the village, wouldn't it? And what's a flooded Park? We can't sit here and see them washed away. We'll blow the Lock. That's what Father would do, isn't it, Mother?

MARIA

I don't know. But it's for you to decide, Cory.

CORY

Of course he would. There's nothing else we can do.

MARSDEN

I warn you. You may get it in here.

CORY

No, we won't. I'm sure the meadows will take it. Come on, we can get the charge from the quarry.

(Exit CORY and MARSDEN.)

KATHERINE

How far away is it?

MARIA

The Lock? Just behind the Plantations.
Poor Katherine, you're not in the house more than a few minutes
Before the River has to flow into your life.
But it always does sooner or later.

KATHERINE

So I see.

MARIA

Now you can see why it's on our Arms
Flowing from father to son.
But a lot gets lost on its way; and I suppose women are its way,
As women are its vehicle.
You'll find yourself loving it;
And you'll find yourself hating it.
But you must not love it.
And you must not hate it.
The only way is to submit to its nature;
Become resigned to its anger and grateful for its grace;
Else it will break you; not with its strength
But with indifference.

KATHERINE

You talk as though it were a god.

MARIA

Do I? No, it's not that.
But whatever it is, it is this family. It is us.

KATHERINE

How?

MARIA

Oh, Cory will tell you and you'll discover;
For it's this family's history and this family's future.
The Strattons were the first to tame the river
And they drained all the valley in the sixteenth century;
And since then, have lived on the land they reclaimed.

KATHERINE

Yes, I know. . . .

MARIA

And every generation or so the river takes its revenge;
Breaks through its banks and has to be re-contained and tamed.

KATHERINE

(*Dryly*) You mean the banks have to be repaired?

MARIA

Yes, the banks have to be repaired. . . .
If you look down on the valley from Highcliff
You can see where the restless river has changed its course.
And if you look back over our family
You can see how the river has shaped its history.
I remember, one winter soon after Cory was born
When the river weakened all its left bank . . .
It was to pay for its repair that made his father leave the estate
and take up a profession.
In a sense one could say that it was the river that made him a
judge . . .
So much of our life has gone into that river.

KATHERINE

And ours will too, I suppose:
Is that what you mean?
It seems everything here has happened before;
So much so, that I do not know what is occurring and what is
only remembered.
How heavy it is. . . .

MARIA

What, Katherine?

KATHERINE

The weight of all this past.

How can Cory and I lead a life of our own
If all we can do is to follow?
/ The past is so insistent in this house,
That our future is only its reflection or recollection.
Already, I become as you were once.
And, as for Cory, he fits into his father's image
As if he were his phantom. . . .

MARIA

But Katherine, that's why his father has made way for him.

KATHERINE

Is it?

MARIA

Yes, of course; and why I'm leaving here to-morrow
So that Kirnstone will be yours.
And without us here it will soon become your home.

KATHERINE

Darling, I didn't mean to sound ungrateful, or just selfish.
What I meant was: what chance have we, or you, or anyone to
make this house their own,
When all of us are just its echo living as marionettes live,
Jigged by this past and wired to this tradition?
When I first came into this room, I knew I was being watched;
(She looks at the portraits.)
I felt like an understudy with the principal looking on;
And I knew I should become a projection of these portraits,
As they live their life again.

MARIA

Katherine, I know just what you feel; I felt like that too.

KATHERINE

There, you see: even my present feelings
Are your old memories.

MARIA

In that case, my dear, you will not have them long,
But find as I did, that there is peace in all this permanence;
And comfort in its continuity;
And what is old about it, love makes new again.

KATHERINE

Yes, of course. I'm sorry, I . . . I'm glad this has happened,
glad that the river has burst its banks and broken.

MARIA

Why?

KATHERINE

Because it breaks more than that. It forces Cory to make a
decision without his father's influence or help. Blowing this
lock will make him feel responsible and make Kirnstone his
in a way nothing else could have done.

(Enter CORY.)

KATHERINE

Well, darling?

CORY

I've never seen anything like it. She's in full flood all right;
And so red with soil it looks as if the land were bleeding.
There's no restraint about her and her banks are falling in like
sand before the tide.

MARIA

And the village?

CORY

Already empty.

KATHERINE

You haven't blown the lock after all?

CORY

We can't.

KATHERINE

(To CORY) Does that matter?

(To STRATTON) Or just what would you have done?

(STRATTON turns towards her but makes no answer. Then he goes over to his portrait, still propped against the wall.)

MARIA

I'd just asked Katherine if she'd mind my taking it up to London to-morrow. You'd like it in your study there, wouldn't you?

(Silence.)

Darling, is anything wrong?

STRATTON

Nothing.

CORY

But we thought . . .

STRATTON

You thought?

MARIA

That you were in London. . . .

STRATTON

You did?

MARIA

Of course, darling. Why, I was coming up to join you to-morrow.

STRATTON

You were?

CORY

Anyhow, it's grand to see you. Katherine and I were just saying how disappointed we were that you couldn't get away.

STRATTON

(*He turns quickly to KATHERINE*) Katherine, were you? Really?

KATHERINE

(*Casually*) Of course. And I do hope you both will stay with us for Christmas.

STRATTON

(*Sarcastically*) How very kind of you to think of us. Tell me, will it be a large party?

KATHERINE

No, just a few friends and . . .

STRATTON

. . . old relatives? And did you enjoy your . . . (*He pauses*).

KATHERINE

Honeymoon? Yes.

MARIA

They stayed at Vermala. You remember, where we were. . . .

STRATTON

Indeed.

CORY

And we found that we'd chosen even the same hotel that you had thirty years before.

KATHERINE

But there were only two.

CORY

Signor Cassonetti is still there. He mistook me for you.

(*KATHERINE laughs.*)

STRATTON

And what's so amusing in that?

KATHERINE

I wouldn't say Cory looked like a judge——

STRATTON

But, Katherine, I'm not a judge.

CORY

What?

MARIA

What do you mean, darling?

STRATTON

What I say: I have resigned.

MARIA

Why? Did the trial upset you?

STRATTON

Not at all.

In fact, I found it strangely satisfying

To try a man for something I, or any man, might do.

If the sleeve of night were turned inside out

And all our dreams became realities.

A way to expiate the sins we commit, but dare not enact, ourselves

Is to be doubly intolerant to those whose only excess is

They add their purpose to our passions and become

Our mercenaries in lust, deputies from our dreams.

Thus, by showing them no mercy, are we more penitent
ourselves

only by one remove.

MARIA

Cory, what's wrong with you?

STRATTON

Nothing; nothing but honesty,
And honesty is supposed to be a virtue.
If it is, it must be the only one there is;
For, once we let honesty light up the cess-pit of our souls,
It seems to extinguish the little candle burning there,
As ruthlessly as a nurse darkens a nursery.
No, nothing is wrong with me—but honesty.

MARIA

And is this man to die?

STRATTON

That's a question for philosophy.
It's certain he will hang.

KATHERINE

Have they found out who he is?

STRATTON

No, and it seemed somewhat pointless to discover his identity
Before death made him anonymous again.

CORY

Father . . .

STRATTON

Is my son shocked?

CORY

I've never heard you talk like this before.

STRATTON

So my son is shocked, eh? And embarrassed
Like a shadow which finds
It's been left behind by the image which defined it.
But as a shadow you can stand alone (KATHERINE *goes over to*
CORY) as you should,

Being a married man in his own right
About to beget a shadow of his own. . . .
Now you can breathe freely; so inflate yourself!
—But mind the draught doesn't blow you out!

CORY

Have you gone mad?

MARIA

Why have you resigned?

STRATTON

Because I wish to resume my place, my position
And be master where I am master.
Why should I make way for my shadow?
I intend to resume my practice.
Cory can be my Junior again.

CORY

You can't do that.

STRATTON

So? Has echo found a voice of his own?
And why?

CORY

You know as well as I
Legal etiquette forbids:
"Once a judge always a judge" . . .

STRATTON

That's right; quote me to my face.

CORY

The scandal would only make us both ridiculous.
They'd say . . .

STRATTON

They'd say, what would they say?

CORY

That you were frightened of missing the limelight of being the fashionable barrister and didn't like to lose the fashionable fees.

MARIA

They'd say the honour of the bench meant nothing to you and . . . (MARIA *turns away*).

STRATTON

Go on.

KATHERINE

You were frightened that your son would be a success.

STRATTON

In what? In words?

Any man can make a speech

So long as he's no thoughts of his own / ✓

To impede his borrowed eloquence. /

Do you think I'd be jealous of a gramophone

Which played what I'd recorded?

KATHERINE

Yes.

MARIA

Well, why did you retire to the bench and tell Cory to take silk if now you only want him to be your junior again?

CORY

Yes, why did you?

STRATTON

Because I hoped you might in time be capable of taking my place,

But though you have got my name and have inherited my style and aped my gestures

And might even acquire my gown and my old chambers
Still you are not me though you might like to be.
I am your father; you are my son.
Would you have me skip into my grave
Merely because you'd like to slide into my life?

CORY

Why did you make me to go in for Law?

STRATTON

Because fathers are vainest in their sons. . . .

KATHERINE

And most jealous too.

CORY

All right you can have your damn profession all to yourself.
But I shan't be your junior again. I'll resign.

STRATTON

Good.

CORY

You really mean that?

STRATTON

Of course. (*He goes to window and looks out.*)
God knows there's enough to do here.
You'd better start by draining this Park
And pumping your exuberance back into the banks I built:
And with your own white hands you can repair the Lock.
When that's done, you'll know how much your concern for
the village was fake.
Our only tradition is self-delusion: you'll dredge that fact out
of the river's mud.
All our tradition lies in that slime.
(*CORY sits dejected and bewildered with his head in his hands.*)

KATHERINE

And Kirnstone? Do you want this place, too? Is that why you've come back?

STRATTON

Would you have me live in the lodge?

KATHERINE

But I thought this was to be my home.

STRATTON

And so it is.

KATHERINE

(Going up to him) Why have you changed your mind?

STRATTON

(Looking at her) Because I now know my heart.

KATHERINE

(Turning away) Cory, let's go. Now, quickly, before . . .

STRATTON

Before what, Katherine?

Surely this house is large enough to hold the three of us?

KATHERINE

Three?

STRATTON

Well, four, if you count my shadow.

MARIA

And five, if you count the man you were

With him whom you've become.

If it were you who gave,

Then who is this now who snatches all away?

And all your sacrifice, was that deception . . .?

STRATTON

No, your illusion.

MARIA

Or was it your self-deception? And this my disillusion?
This can't be you; or, if it is, then I have loved a ghost.
What tortures you, for you to make Cory suffer so?
What fault has any son but his father's likeness. . . .

STRATTON

. . . and his Mother's love?

MARIA

. . . What has he done but become as you have made him;
Guiding his feet till he walked as you walk;
Making his lips repeat till he talked as you talk;
And always you proudly applauded his mimicry
Till he grew up—then you called it "loyalty"
This was their day. Oh, where's the man I loved?

STRATTON

You ask me one question. I will ask another.
Where is the woman who loved me more than any other
Man, father or brother?
I will tell you: she became a mother.
 You, who were my wife
 You became his mother.
And I, who was your husband, friend and lover,
 Lost my identity
 In night's duplicity. . . .

MARIA

You know that isn't true.

STRATTON

Like moles men burrow
From one oblivion to another:
Out from a mother, back to a wife.
Their life is all this; their death is in this.

For in their brief consummation men cast a shadow
Which in darkness grows till it over-shadows them.
When any woman loves a man,
It is the child in him whom she adores.
And after, it is all intimate deceit.
. . . Isn't that true?

MARIA

As words are. (*She goes over to CORY.*)

STRATTON

Isn't that true?

(*MARIA places her hand on CORY's head.*)

You answer with your hand.

CORY

(*Brushing MARIA away*) Oh leave me alone, Mother!

Don't touch me! Or this maniac will think

There's some reason behind his rhetoric. . . .

(*CORY rushes out of the room and stands outside by the door looking into the Park.*)

MARIA

(*Going to STRATTON*) Cory, what secret love

Does all this hate conceal?

(*STRATTON looks, as it were, through MARIA to KATHERINE who, sensing his glance, goes off stage right.*)

You answer with your eyes.

STRATTON

. . . Katherine! (*He follows her off.*)

MARIA

(*Putting her hands to her eyes*) And blind me with a look.

Oh God, why do those we love take such callous aim?

And what wounds a woman's heart more than a woman's name?

Now all's said, all's spoken;

All breaks, all's broken—

The rest is rubble and growing old.

(She lowers her hands. Then, realizing she is blind, she calls out after STRATTON.)

Cory! Cory!

(Her son, hearing his name, comes in.)

CORY

Mother . . .

MARIA

(Hearing his voice, pulls herself together, pretending that she can see) No, Cory, I was just calling your father. . . . It was nothing.

CORY

Isn't there anything I can do?

MARIA

(She walks over to the window and looks out) Nothing.

(Pause.)

You see what I mean?

CORY

What, Mother?

MARIA

How indifferent this view is to our feelings.

And now how hideous all appears.

Look how the old elms clutch the bank;

Their roots writhing like tortured serpents

Or as fingers of a fantastic hand they throttle the earth

To keep the old trunk balanced on the bank.

Yet they are not in agony.

It is we who are tortured.

Wherever we look we see ourselves

It is as though we're blind.

CORY

Is there nothing I can do?

MARIA

You must take Katherine away. And make your own home and begin again

(Enter KATHERINE ready to leave. MARIA, being blind, cannot see her and does not hear her.)

Go, Cory, now. Go and find Katherine.

(KATHERINE stands in front of MARIA still holding her suitcase.)

Else the four of us will tread upon each other's hearts
And caught in this house will all become as ghosts haunting
each other round and round a corkscrew stair
Fixed in intimate hate like these portraits staring from the wall.
Go, Cory, go and find Katherine. . . .

(CORY runs to Maria. KATHERINE, realizing Maria is blind, slowly puts her suitcase down, takes off her gloves and then lifts the portrait of Stratton back on to the wall.)

STRATTON stands framed in the doorway again, watching her. When the picture is hung, he comes in and, with deliberation, slowly shuts the door.)

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

Several weeks later. The same scene.

MARIA is seated by the hearth: STRATTON stands by the window, their backs to one another.

It is an autumn evening, a heavy sea mist sulks over the land. A foghorn sounds in the distance.

MARIA gets up and feels for the poker: she moves a log and then finds her way back to her chair.

The foghorn sounds again.

STRATTON

(To himself) Why doesn't she say something?

MARIA

(To herself) What is he thinking?

STRATTON

(To himself) For seven weeks she has sat
Looking through blind eyes at the embers.

MARIA

(To herself) Staring into the darkness
With the vision of blindness.

STRATTON

(To himself) What is she thinking?

MARIA

(To herself) All day he has stood by the window.

STRATTON

(*To himself*) The riderless wraiths of the mist
Like sea-horses rise from the sea,
The undying grief of the wind |
Mourns through a leafless tree,
As the satin skirt of the night
Is drawn over the lawns of light.

MARIA

(*To herself*) Why doesn't he say something?
Never a word heard
In this house but an echo
Reverberating through the empty corridors
And vacant halls of memory
Which is all my mind.
If he had spoken
I would have forgiven;
Now is all said? Is all said?
(*There is a Long Pause. Only the foghorn is heard.*)

STRATTON

(*To himself*) Christ! how that noise |
Nails us to silence! . . .
Now it is almost dark
And the flooded park
Lies in the lap of night . . .
Soon, another damn day will sneak from the shadows
Like a rat from the wainscoting
To gnaw the shoulders of the night,
And then, and then the fidget of the dawn will worry the world
awake again
As the earth turns over like an old mill wheel;
No wonder a man loses his balance and falls into his grave.

MARIA

(*To herself*) It was my fault to look;
For when we peer into each other's hearts,

We see such darkness there
It is as though we're blind.
What can a woman do
But stare at the ashes of her life
Remembering the flames that were
All his love and all her life or, were only the warmth of dreams.
(Pause.)
What is the time, Cory?

STRATTON

Six o'clock. (Pause.)
(To himself) It seems that man is so designed
That he should suffer most.
As a grape within a press
So is my soul confined,
Between the weight of my desires
And an unyielding will;
And neither can withdraw
And both unmercifully tightened
By the relentlessness of time till
I, in this duress, confess to the torturer who is deaf and my
conscience which is blind.
Thus is a man confined,
Fixed between extremities, defined by his disparities,
And is his soul lamed, maimed as he's made mad
By memory—or a mist.

MARIA

Has Cory come back?

STRATTON

How should I know?

MARIA

He will meet his death down there working all day by the river.
Oh, why do you treat him like this,
Turning your son into an unpaid labourer?
Is that why you made him a barrister?

Is that why you gave him everything, merely to snatch it all
away
And thus humiliate him more?

STRATTON

He needn't stay here.

MARIA

Nor need we. Let us go, Cory. This is their home.
You gave it to them. Oh, don't you remember?

STRATTON

And is there no room for me?

MARIA

For you; but not your hate which fills this house and valley
like the flooded river.

STRATTON

If they don't like it, why don't they go?

MARIA

Would you let them, if they did?
No, hate needs its target as much as love
Needs the object of which it is a shadow; as I was yours.
And how could Cory go and leave me blind
With the river washing our past, which is his future, all away?
But hurting him—why do you suffer so?
Is it yourself you hate? (*She goes to him.*)
Darling what's wrong with you?
Why do you stand there by the window
Staring out into the night?
What are you looking for?

STRATTON

A way out.

MARIA

From what?

STRATTON

The night.

We are as all men are:

Like gargoyles squeezed out from the cathedral of the night.

And listen, can't you hear our scream?

MARIA

I can hear a trapped rabbit caught out on the cliff crying in
its iron vice of pain.

STRATTON

Yes, it is crying with our pain.

For we are trapped

With one foot caught within each other's graves.

What else can you hear?

MARIA

Nothing, but the great waves breaking

And my small heart beating

And both repeating

And each competing

In callous counterpoint. . .

STRATTON

. . . Yes, indifference is all of time. . .

But what else do you hear?

MARIA

Only the wind which we have heard all our lives so that we
no longer hear it. . . .

STRATTON

. . . as it blows our lives away!

MARIA

Why does the wind frighten you?

What is the wind to frighten you?

STRATTON

It is the skirt of light
Drawn over the earth
As she leaves the night.

What is the wind?
It is the thought of death
In the frightened mind
At the final breath.

What is the wind?
It is grief! It is grief!
A maniac mourning
A fallen leaf—for a leaf.

And look how it tears that leaf

MARIA

Yes, I see; but you forget that I am blind.
(Pause.)

STRATTON

Yes, what did the doctors say?

MARIA

They say I cannot see
Because I am afraid to look.

STRATTON

How glib! Afraid to look at what?

MARIA

Cory, why do you hate me so?
(Pause.)
Is there nothing you can say?

(MARIA waits for a second: then returns to her place by the fire.)

(*To STRATTON*) Blindness blindfolded can pick its way
Through a labyrinth of laurel,
And thread a garden maze in and out
With more sureness than a woman can
Find her way about a man's dark heart,
Once she is lost within it.

(*Pause.*)

STRATTON

(*To himself*) Is she within it?
No; however much we love
Or we are loved, we are alone
And in our hearts are
Each separate as a stone.

What star is there
In what unfathomed firmament
As lonely as man is
Within his little heart?

What tiny shell
In what enormous ocean
Lies so deep and dark
As man beneath the puddle of his soul?

And, God, how maudlin man becomes
When he stands on the edge of the night
And chucks the pebbles of his spirit
Into this pitiless pit
Where echo is his answer.

If anyone could hear
These secret fears of mine
How melodramatic they would sound.
They'd say I was playing to the gallery.
So I am, but the gallery
Is the indifference of the stars.
And from that reality
Do not wake me back to dreams.

But if she is not within it,
 Then what is it that fills my heart?
It is fear
 Like a maggot
 In a nut:
 Fear in my heart feeds on my heart
Till it leaves the shell
 Empty as echo
 Rinsed round about a bell;
And fear creeps out
 And fat grief flaunts its wings;
Then our sons observe
 the moth that was
 the rags that were
 All their fathers' hearts.

Thus the self, sensing its own mortality,
mourns for itself
 And with self-pity
Anticipates its exequies in an inarticulate soliloquy
 Before the vast yawn of night.
Yes, it's strange how night reveals
What light conceals
 From the furtive rats which are our busy purblind eyes;

Why does this fear of death obsess me,
 Making each day a slow march to the tombstone
At which I stand chief mourner and the corpse? ✓
Is it because I see my son replacing me,
 Time flowing to him,
 Time bleeding from me . . . ?

MARIA

Cory, what's the time?

STRATTON

What's the time?

MARIA

Yes, darling, that's what I said. . . .

STRATTON

It's his time; that's what I said.

MARIA

I'm sorry. I didn't hear you. But there you are, you see; you've been worrying over Cory as much as I have. Now do come and sit down, and let's talk things out. I cannot bear this silence. What have you been thinking about? Tell me.

STRATTON

I suppose one might say I have been considering the expediency
Of taking out a Life Insurance Policy for Cory's benefit.

I must, of course, look to his future

And let interest accrue,

And thus assure

That the family's continuity is maintained,

And this restless river be recontained.

Each stone in this house sits where it sits

Because each legatee turned testator

Paying off the mortgages incurred during his life

With the reversionary policies covering his death.

This roof rests on our predecessors' bones.

These beams, purlins and joists: their skeleton.

I ask you: what better security can a son have than his father's
death?

MARIA

Cory, why are you so bitter?

You even seem to hate Kirnstone now.

Once it meant everything to you.

There was never a gate hung, but you hung it;

Or a tree planted, but you placed it.

Your energy was inexhaustible.

You were always planning for the future, don't you remember?

STRATTON

Yes, that's what I was trying to do now; face the future;
But in an old-fashioned way.
Perhaps I'd do better now to make the entire estate over to the
nation
And be more contemporary and less responsible?
For that is the way the tide's running:
What they call the nobility move out
And the *mobility* move in.
I suppose one may as well let them in through the front door
And so preserve one's manners;
As let them break in through the back door and disturb one's
peace of mind.
It is all the same in the end, and I am the end.
Yes, yes, I know everything I say sounds like an epilogue;
It is an epilogue.

MARIA

You're so different. Sometimes you make me feel almost
As if I were a widow. . . .

STRATTON

And what do you expect me to do? Marry you again?

MARIA

Oh darling, what's made you change so much?
Only a few weeks ago, you were
So happy with me, proud of Cory, and of Kirnstone.
Everybody in the village loved you, the whole county looked
up to you.
You were more than successful in that you were content
With your success.

STRATTON

Yes, I know; yet fulfilment doesn't lie in being what one is:
But in becoming what one thinks one is.

MARIA

And that?

STRATTON

A young man forever young.

I suppose all men imagine themselves as young men thinking
all time is their time.

And in that comfortable conceit we then concede

Purpose to the past in that it moves towards us,

And importance in the future in that we are the future.

We imagine we are as immortal as the God whom we imagine:

Then we wake up and feel the quiet weight of the grave.

MARIA

Why are you so morbid?

STRATTON

I don't know; perhaps I'd better see a doctor—or perhaps an
undertaker could cure it better.

MARIA

I wish I understood you. I wish I could understand what has
happened to you.

You used to be so tolerant, moderate and sane.

Now everything about you is extreme,

Like a reflection seen in a wave-shaped mirror.

It's as though this house were haunted

By a ghost who had not died.

And all that we had woven in thirty years

Has, in as many days, been torn up and blown away.

Turning my memories counterfeit till I suspect the love we had

Was all imagination.

You seem so lonely; yet you shun everybody's company.

Why don't you ask John up here?

STRATTON

We have too much in common now

To tolerate each other.

MARIA

You've never been the same since . . .

STRATTON

You say I'm not myself; it is, you never knew me.
Nor did I,
Few of us dare recognize our reveries
Or what our reveries conceal and can reveal.
You say I was once moderate, tolerant and sane? /
It was: my desires never met their opportunities; /
And my fears were inarticulate, restrained.
Sanity is as narrow as a razor's edge; /
And once a man sees the serpents in the pit, he fears to fall,
And fearing, falls.
We are born in passion; we die in passion, or desiring passion.
Do you love me? Don't answer. Don't lie to me.
For what is love unless one loves completely?
And how can any woman love the whole of any man? /
(STRATTON *suddenly kneels by MARIA's side and lays his head on*
her lap.)
Oh, would that a man could submit to God
With the same ease he can kneel to a woman!
Why do we all behave worst
To those we love most?

MARIA

Don't talk any more; not with your lips;
Only eyes are eloquent:
Let me look into your eyes. Oh, Cory, help me to see!

STRATTON

If I have hated you, it was because
My love for you made me too vulnerable to grief.
For one of us one day must wake up to a world which is without
the other.
And listen to that wind! What is the wind?
It is God laughing up his sleeve of night,
For he has made man capable of immortal love /
Then lamed him with mortality.
It's a good joke, but not in the best of taste.

MARIA

Darling, lay your head on my lap again.
Tell me, why do you torture yourself with these imaginary
fears?
None of them is real. . . .

STRATTON

Real? Is it not realistic to look where one is going?
And where am I going? I am going there:

Where the night is so dark
It lies over the earth like a shadow;
I am going there
Where the night is so hard
It breaks off my nails as I feel it.
I am going there:
Where the night is so thick
It feels like fur as I breathe it.

Where am I going? I am going to death.

But you are right. Realism does not exist in seeing life as it is;
But in seeing only that part which we can endure and thus accept.
That's the convention, isn't it? (*He stands up.*)
Well, to return to convention: shall we have a drink?

MARIA

I wonder if your melancholy is as reasonable as you suppose?
I believe that, when we despair, it is because we do not complete
our thought.
You fear death: but you cannot die. How can you die?
Your looks will live for ever;
You will live forever.

STRATTON

How? How?

MARIA

Why, in Cory, of course.

STRATTON

That's not enough!

MARIA

He is you.

STRATTON

Yes! Yes!

MARIA

Oh, promise me when he comes in to treat him as you used. Darling, help him as you said you would and let them have this house. . . . Here they come,—you promise. . . .

STRATTON

. . . I promise.

(Enter CORY and KATHERINE. They are dressed for rough country work: and both look dishevelled and tired.)

I promise . . . like a man.

MARIA

Where have you two been? Darling, why are you so late?

CORY

(He goes over and kisses MARIA) Are we?

MARIA

Yes, we've been worried. Your father was just going down to the river to look for you.

CORY

(Turning to his father, incredulous) Were you?

MARIA

(Quickly) Yes. And for the last two hours he's done nothing but stand by the window watching for you to come across the Park. You must both be chilled to the marrow working all day down there by the Lock.

KATHERINE

(She goes across room as if to exit front stage right. She passes

STRATTON *who stands in her way*) Good evening, Father. (*He flinches.*)

MARIA

Katherine dear, where are you going?

KATHERINE

To my room.

MARIA

Please don't. Do come and sit here by the fire. (*MARIA gets out of her own chair.*) This mist is treacherous; it gets inside you till it seems to rust your bones. There, do come and sit down. (*To STRATTON*) Cory, give Katherine a drink. Let's all have one.

STRATTON

Why, of course. (*He goes to the sideboard.*) And how's the dam going, Cory?

CORY

(*Sullenly, on his guard*) All right. They've nearly finished. Why don't you come and have a look if you're interested?

STRATTON

I am interested. But I didn't want you to think I was over-seeing your work. . . .

CORY

(*Sarcastically*) Of course.

STRATTON

. . . I know how sensitive and competent you are. . . .

(*KATHERINE stands up suddenly.*)

MARIA

No, Katherine, please—please don't go.

KATHERINE

(Putting her glass down unemptied, as if to leave the room) Oh, what's the use? I can't stand any more. I'm sick of this interminable tension, this endless wrangling. . . .

STRATTON

Where are you going?

KATHERINE

Anywhere, anywhere out of this house.
For weeks the four of us have been fixed
Like those portraits on the wall, watching each other,
Hating each other and unable to leave each other.
(She goes to door front stage right. CORY follows her then turns to his mother.)

CORY

I'm sorry, Mother. But it's no use going on like this; we've talked it over and decided.

MARIA

(Cutting them off, desperately) So have we. No, don't go, Katherine. All this is over. It is we who are going. Isn't it, Cory?
(STRATTON turns away.) Yes, these weeks have been a nightmare but none of us is to blame. These situations always end in the same fashion: and two generations never agree. We are going and we want to go. That's how it should be and now that's how it is. *(MARIA goes towards the stairs.)*

KATHERINE

(Helping her) Darling, I'm sorry.

MARIA

(Turns and kisses KATHERINE, then looks at STRATTON) Tell them, Cory. Remember your promise. And don't be long. I want you to help me pack. *(Exit MARIA through door on balcony.)*
(There is an awkward pause.)

CORY

Well, is it true?

STRATTON

Yes, Cory, it's true. This time, it is true.
I've been thinking things over and I've decided
I may as well make way for you now,
And at least get the kudos of making a gift,
As cling on and let you inherit it by right,
For the dead get little gratitude.
Their generosity is imposed upon them;
Their liberality is derived paradoxically from their reduced
circumstances.
So there it is: I've decided to make Kirnstone over to you
As I said I would when you were married;
For that's our family tradition, isn't it?
I'm sorry my gift has not been more immediate
But tradition is a strange thing—as you will find in your time
or when you have had it—
It is all very well when it is turning towards you,
But quite another matter when it is moving away.
Anyhow, do you accept?

CORY

You really mean . . . ?

STRATTON

Yes, Cory. And I suggest you go up to Town to-morrow and
arrange to take silk and immediately move into my old cham-
bers. With your talent and my name you will in time stand
where I stood.

CORY

There, Katherine, didn't I tell you everything would be all
right in the end? Didn't I?

KATHERINE

Yes. (*Going to STRATTON*) You are a strange man.

STRATTON

Am I, Katherine?

KATHERINE

Yes, I hardly know you.

STRATTON

What? When you know my son so well?

CORY

Don't worry, darling. You'll get to know him well enough. We must all spend Christmas here as we first planned. . . .

STRATTON

Why, of course we will. As I say, it's a different matter when it's flowing away. . . .

CORY

What is?

STRATTON

Oh nothing, but you'll discover. Where are you going, Katherine?

KATHERINE

To pack.

STRATTON

Why?

KATHERINE

I am going with Cory, of course.

STRATTON

But you can't leave Kirnstone.

KATHERINE

And why not?

CORY

But just now you told me to go—

STRATTON

So I did.

My practice is yours; Kirnstone is yours.

This roof will be yours: this stone will be yours:

Farms, cottages, gates, wells and pumps: all yours.

But you must accept the responsibility that is entailed with this estate.

CORY

Why, of course.

STRATTON

Then Katherine must stay here at Kirnstone and help me manage the place whilst you are away in London. . . .

KATHERINE

I stay here alone with you?

STRATTON

And Maria, Katherine!

KATHERINE

You're mad!

CORY

But obviously I thought you were going back to the bench again.

STRATTON

(*With mock solemnity*) No, I shall judge no more.

CORY

But that's what Mother thinks you've decided to do. . . .

STRATTON

She must have misunderstood me, as you did. You know you can't expect to have it both ways.

CORY

Why not? That's what you want, isn't it?

STRATTON

And what precisely do you mean by that?

CORY

Aren't you trying to manoeuvre me, so that you stay here with Mother and . . .

KATHERINE

No, Cory, don't argue with him. Let's go now. Quick—or are you blind like Maria?

CORY

There's no need for you or Katherine to stay here. I'll get Marsden back. I'll send him a wire. He can manage the estate as well as either of us.

STRATTON

And you two will just look in for an occasional week-end to see how he's getting on. Is that it?

CORY

Why not? That's exactly what you did.

STRATTON

But that was a different matter. Marsden and I had worked together for many years. He grew to anticipate my decisions.

CORY

As he would mine.

STRATTON

I wonder. Well, there it is, Katherine; it's for you to decide: either you stay here and learn to manage the estate, or I'll give

the damn place to the nation. It would make a wonderful hostel for frustrated women.

CORY

And why won't you go back to London?

STRATTON

Do you want to know?

CORY

Yes.

STRATTON

Because I'd find it intolerably embarrassing
To watch you imitate my manner without my matter.
It's bad enough here watching you guy me around the place,
Ordering keepers to stock weasel-infested coverts . . .
And, by the way, why precisely did you countermand my orders
And have Highcliffe planted out in spruce when I ordered oak?

CORY

It'll be fit to cut in twenty years.

STRATTON

And what of that?

CORY

They'll come for felling about the same time your death
duties will be incurred.

STRATTON

And so might oak have paid for yours or your son's son—if
you could sire a son.
(CORY goes as if to hit STRATTON. KATHERINE gets between them.)

KATHERINE

No, Cory!

STRATTON

To which of us do you appeal?

(CORY exits abruptly.)

STRATTON

(Shouting after him) That's right, run to your mother. Run to my wife and leave me yours. My God, that's the height of insult!

(Pause.)

Well, go on. What are you waiting for?

(Pause.)

Why don't you go after him?

/ Doesn't your blood flow to the youth in him?

| And your breast lift to the touch of him?

(Pause.)

| Answer me! Don't stand there staring

| Like an accusing figure from a dream

Or is this a dream?

Oh, Katherine, for pity's sake please go.

(He sits with his head buried in his hands. KATHERINE slowly goes to him. He looks up.)

I see you know.

KATHERINE

Yes, I know.

STRATTON

Oh, Katherine, I have tried.

My eyes promised my heart

That they would not look at you.

My heart promised my soul

That it would not seek you.

But my eyes have deceived my heart

And my heart has betrayed my soul

To you who are its citadel.

Oh, God, is it a sin to love?

Or is this the punishment?

Oh, God, if it is a sin to love

Then this sin should go unpunished;

For we do the penance as we love.

(Pause.)

Now you know, why do you stay?
Doesn't the pawing of an old man disgust you?

(Pause.)

Or don't you love him?

KATHERINE

Yes, I love him.

STRATTON

Then why don't you go?

KATHERINE

Because I love him
And in you . . .

STRATTON

Yes? Yes?

KATHERINE

. . . I catch a glimpse of him.

STRATTON

No! It's I you see in him.
✓ I am the model: he the copy!
I the image: he the metaphor!
If you don't feel as I feel, why do you stay?

KATHERINE

I stayed for pity.

STRATTON

For pity? Oh, then—for pity's sake please go!
(KATHERINE goes into the Library.)

What am I doing? What have I done?

Was that me? (He goes to the mirror)

Or is this me?

| It seems that a man is only as strong as his weaknesses
| And is as strange to himself as he is to his desires.

(He laughs)

Which is just as well, for if we were faced with ourselves
Every time we glanced at our reflection
Then *(he feels his chin)* most men would grow beards. . . .
"Distinguished perhaps. . . ."

"The eyes of a Saint, the lips of a Sinner"

(He laughs at himself)

Yes, the loose lips of a lecher. . . .

Yes, now I'm fit to judge: the small-eyed blackmailer.
Perhaps even murderers too are eligible to stand secure
Under my judicial eye.

(He looks away from the mirror)

Well, John,

Nothing joins friends so fast as when they wink at each other's
weaknesses,

Or swap intimate anecdotes to support each other's self-esteem.
To hide their self-disgust.

(Looking back into mirror.)

And we'd better learn to tolerate ourselves,
Let the image wink at the reflection,
And find a *modus vivendi* in self-deception;
For how difficult it is to be moderate,
When one's desires are as extreme as mine,
And when she whom I desire is here when I desire,
Ycs, . . .

"To love when the object of your love stands before
you.

To hate when the object of your hate stands before you."

(He turns from mirror.)

Oh, God, if I'm to hate with the same intensity that I have loved,
It would be better if I were left alone;

(Enter CORY.)

CORY

Where's Katherine?

STRATTON

Oh, go away. Leave me alone!

No, come here, my son—perhaps my quicksilver temperament

Which runs from love to hate and is never moderate
May move to love again and there set
And keep us two as we were once before.
Sit down and tell me, Cory, how is your mother?
Have you told her that I have kept my promise:
Given you the practice? And does she understand that I'm
not . . .

CORY

She knew before I told her—
She sees through you.

STRATTON

I wish I were as blind!
For if I could not see what I desire
When I desire it;
And did not look upon what I loathe
When I detest it;
Temptation would be less terrible.
Don't stand there, boy.
Get out of my sight!
Can't you see I'm begging you to go.
I should be left alone. . . .

CORY

If that's all you want, I needn't go.
For you say I'm just your shadow,
If I am, and we are so much alike—like father like son,
Then being together each of us can count himself
Alone, as much alone
As man before a mirror.

STRATTON

Yes, I suppose that's true.
And if we loved ourself
We'd love one another.
But I ask you: Will you go?

CORY

In my own time.

STRATTON

I've warned you. I order you to go.

CORY

Oh, shut up! I'll come when I want to come. I'll go when it pleases me to go.

When I have made up my mind. D'you hear? My mind.

And now you can listen to my mind and see how much it's yours.

For thirty years I have let you bully me
And have shown conventional filial gratitude
For conventional paternal tyranny.

I have not lived till now;

Till now all my life has been your life by one remove.

You did not give me birth, but sought to recreate yourself.

You did not give me life: you tried to evade your own death,

And sneak a suspension of your own mortality

Through me with all this talk of tradition and continuity.

You complain of the embarrassment of having me echo your voice:

But for thirty years I have had you anticipate

My sensations and stale them with your experience.

Even my handwriting fits into your scrawl. . . .

Why do you smirk?

STRATTON

Well, it's not often a man can indulge in the sensation of being a god. . . .

CORY

Don't preen yourself. You're no more the original than I am.

That's right: stand up, take things under your own control.

Be master of the situation. . . .

Fool! You cannot even stand except as your own father
Stood.

(STRATTON *begins to move backwards towards the desk.*)

And look how your hand goes behind your back

Whenever you are angry. That's a trick that tethers you

To your grandfather. I can remember, and there's proof in his
portrait

If you've forgotten as marionettes forget.

You're not even unique in your signature:

Both of us cross the T's in Stratton with his dead hand.

(Pointing to the portrait of the Judge.)

Both of us are denied even the privacy of personality,

Both of us are fixed in this hereditary tyranny

And live, not in ourselves, but through our fathers and our sons

STRATTON

Will you go?

(STRATTON feels behind him for a drawer in the desk.)

CORY

Yes, I'll go. But not back to your profession.

I'm not going to let you live through me again

And have your achievements goading my ambitions

And your ambitions belittling my achievements.

Katherine and I will leave here in the morning. . . .

(He moves to go.)

STRATTON

Will you?

CORY

. . . As for Kirnstone: you can keep this mausoleum of ghosts.
It shall all end in you.

You denied me my life

And this way I will assure you your death.

(STRATTON still has a hand behind his back. CORY, at door, has his back to his father. STRATTON's hand reveals the butt of a revolver held behind him.)

STRATTON

Wait a minute, Cory. Don't go like this.

Hate as intimate as ours is so much like love

We must find a way—if only for your mother's sake.

CORY

(*Coming back*) That's the only reason I've stayed at all.

STRATTON

Yes, that I know. Come here, my boy.

Let's feel our way back to the affection we once knew.

All this has been my fault.

Perhaps when you, too, come in your turn to retire

And make way for your son, you'll find it as difficult as I have done.

Let us forget these last weeks by remembering what we were once to one another.

Do you remember your fifth birthday?

And my teaching you to ride without a saddle?

Do you remember?

CORY

Yes.

STRATTON

And how proud you were of your first pony?

What was her name?

CORY

I forget. Oh, Father, what's the use?

STRATTON

And do you remember that walking tour we made together?

CORY

(*Coming nearer*) Yes, I remember.

STRATTON

And your first shoot?

CORY

(*Dropping reserve, he faces audience*) Yes, I did quite well that day, didn't I, Father?

STRATTON

Yes, my son, you always were a quicker shot than I.

(Only the audience can see the gun as STRATTON is still facing balcony.)

I don't hate you, Cory.

I love you.

Shall I tell you

How I love you?

(CORY still facing audience drops all reserve goes closer to his father; he now stands at the bottom of the stairs. The following should be spoken in a frenzy of speed.)

I love you

As a woman loves deceit

When she finds herself the victim

Of man's counterfeit.

I love you

As a leper loves his bell

As he stumbles in the gutter

Of his hell.

I love you

As a cripple loves his pain

When he twists in night's anatomy

Then groans again.

I love you as any father loves his son

I love you as I love myself.

God how I hate you.

I hate you

As a daughter hates her mother

When they are both rivals

For the same lover.

I hate you

As a priest hates his God

When he discovers

The nature of his God.

I hate you as a phantom hates the dust
Which defines his form and makes him recognized
As ghost.

I hate you
As a father hates a son,
For you have filched my life
And my life had only just begun.

That is how I love you!
That is how I hate you!
And in the extremity of my passion/
Both are as one, identified.
Oh God will you go?

CORY

No.

STRATTON

Oh, why do I hate you so?

CORY

Shall I tell you?

STRATTON

I dare you to go on.

CORY

Because of Katherine.
Desiring my life
You lecher after my wife.

(STRATTON has all this time kept his hand on the revolver in his hip pocket, now draws the gun and points it at his son. Before he can shoot, the door on the balcony opens.)

MARIA feels her way towards the stairs. STRATTON can see her. CORY, with his back to the stairs, cannot. MARIA is still blind.)

STRATTON

(Quickly, still pointing gun at CORY) No, Cory! You can have all, all my life, but do not take your own. Don't shoot; put that gun down.

MARIA

Cory!

(STRATTON shoots CORY dead. MARIA is half-way down the stairs. STRATTON is facing her over the body. Silently the Library door front stage right behind STRATTON's back opens slightly and KATHERINE is shown. She watches STRATTON place the gun in his son's dead hand.)

STRATTON

Now there is only one of us to call.

MARIA

Is he dead?

STRATTON

He took the life we gave him
As if it were his own.
I tried to stop him. You heard me?

MARIA

Yes I heard you.
May this night never know day!
(She goes tenderly to STRATTON.)

Oh why? Why?

(STRATTON puts his arm tenderly round MARIA and leads her up the stairs to her room. KATHERINE opens the Library door, runs to the body and, as she bends over it STRATTON comes out of MARIA's room and looks over the balcony. KATHERINE gets up and runs out of the front door, back stage centre. STRATTON runs down the stairs and follows her.)

STRATTON

Katherine! Katherine!

CURTAIN

ACT FOUR

The same room in Kirnstone Manor. It is the following afternoon.

When the Curtain Rises, STRATTON is seen standing with his back to the open fire: MARIA and KATHERINE are seated one each side of him. The latter faces the audience.

STRATTON wears a black silk band round his right arm. MARIA is in mourning: KATHERINE is not.

A few seconds' awkward silence.

KATHERINE

Will you have one lump or two?

STRATTON

Two please.

(KATHERINE passes a coffee cup to him.)

(The three stir their coffee with strange deliberation as though this trivial act gave each some relief from the situation. Another pause.)

KATHERINE

(To MARIA, looking at window) Is the sun . . . ?

STRATTON

(Taken off guard, quickly) What son?

KATHERINE

(With half-smile) I was wondering whether the light was too strong for Maria's eyes.

MARIA

No, darling, it doesn't worry me.

STRATTON

(Now attentive) Are you sure? Let me draw the blinds a little.

(He does so, and then resumes his place before the fire.

There is another awkward silence.

A grandfather clock strikes three. STRATTON takes out his own watch and carefully checks the time. He goes across the room and taking a key from his chain opens the clock and meticulously adjusts the pendulum.)

This thing has gained a minute a day since the Lock was blown.

KATHERINE

Strange you should notice it.

(The following is played with a certain stylized remoteness.)

STRATTON

(Taking up stance again by fire) Is it? No, at my time of life,
Katherine

One becomes a miser with time, for time is all our life.

And as we count it, it is counting us: listen.

But the more avaricious we become

The quicker time seems to spend us.

It is only when our time is finished, that it is without an end.

What more does any man discover than that his time is finite . . .

MARIA

. . . Yet infinite in agony.

But time is no torturer

It is we who torture it

Turning the rack of our hearts

Stretching each second till the minutes groan with hours

As we sit with memory as a rosary;

As we sit here; waiting and waiting.

I wish that they would come.

KATHERINE

Yes, if all our time passed as slowly

As it does now when we mourn,

Then we would never have cause for grief:

For no one's time would ever spill away
And all our life would have the leisure that is death's.
(*They become more matter-of-fact.*)

MARIA

I wish it were all over. Why don't they come?

STRATTON

They're only five minutes late. They'll soon be here.

MARIA

Must private grief be turned like this into public news?

STRATTON

Don't worry, darling. It is only a formality.

MARIA

I'm thinking of the strain it will be for you.

STRATTON

For me? Why? I'm used to this sort of thing.

KATHERINE

Are you?

STRATTON

Yes, I mean the procedure, the formality.

KATHERINE

Perhaps that's why your self-control is so much like . . .
(*She gets up and goes across the room. He follows her.*)

STRATTON

. . . like what, Katherine?

KATHERINE

(Quietly) . . . indifference.

(on that word the Butler enters and goes to the front door, back stage.)

Enter MR. NASHE, the family solicitor and DR. QUARLES, the family physician. They are followed by a Police Constable and are announced and greeted in the customary manner.

The Butler remains in the room adjusting the blind.

The following is played with formality, almost exaggerated.)

MR. NASHE

(To MARIA) Dear Lady Stratton, your loss is such, it silences my sympathy.

How strange it is, that when we have feelings to express,
We are as inarticulate and dumb
As animals which are supposed to have no feelings.

DR. QUARLES

(To KATHERINE) The pity is, that though we share your loss
None of us can halve your sorrow.

(The Doctor goes to MARIA.)

MR. NASHE

(To KATHERINE) Those who knew him, loved him,
We all knew him; the whole county is bewildered by this
tragedy.

DR. QUARLES

(To STRATTON) May this hand express . . .

MR. NASHE

(To STRATTON) For you it must be as though a part of you had
died.

As Courtenay says . . .

STRATTON

(*Breaking off*) Yes, thank you, Nashe. Now shall we proceed?

MR. NASHE

By all means. (*Turns to MARIA*) With your permission, Lady Stratton.

MARIA

Lambourne, will you please draw the chairs to the table and remove the flowers?

(*The Butler does so, and then goes out with the coffee tray.*)
Thank you, Lambourne.

MR. NASHE

(*Opening portfolio*) I only wish I could have spared you this formality. And I do hope I did right in suggesting that we should hold the inquest here. (*He takes out a legal volume.*) You will, of course, correct me, Sir Cory, but by my reading of "*Jervis, The Coroner's Act 1921*"—fortunately a most comprehensive volume—the coroner is empowered to choose the place in which to hold his inquest. Am I not right?

STRATTON

Precisely.

MR. NASHE

Quite so. And though, of course, an inquest is of a public nature—and anyone in the town could claim admittance to it, I thought that by holding it here a certain privacy might be assured; and that I weighed against the pain you must all feel at being in the very room.

STRATTON

Exactly.

MR. NASHE

Sergeant Morcombe is here in the position of Coroner's officer; but, as you know, Sir, in that capacity, he is *ex-officio* to the constabulary proper.

STRATTON

(*Impatiently*) Quite correct. We are at your service.

MR. NASHE

Then we will begin. (*He seats himself rather pompously at the centre of the refectory table, opens a book and begins to write.*) I will conduct these proceedings as informally as possible. We are here to inquire into the death of the late Cory Stratton.

Dr. Quarles, will you please give your evidence?

(*He glances at the legal volume open before him.*) But first will you please repeat the oath which Sergeant Morcombe will administer.

(*The Constable states the oath which the Doctor repeats in the usual manner.*)

DR. QUARLES

"I swear by Almighty God that the Evidence I shall give at this Inquest on behalf of our Sovereign Lord King George VI touching the death of Cory Stratton shall be the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

MR. NASHE

Doctor Quarles, do you identify the deceased as being the body of the late Cory Stratton?

DR. QUARLES

Yes, I do.

MR. NASHE

How long had you known the deceased?

DR. QUARLES

Since his birth.

MR. NASHE

Let me see now, he would have been thirty-three on his next birthday, wouldn't he? (*He writes.*) Did you attend him in a professional capacity?

DR. QUARLES

Yes.

MR. NASHE

When did you last have cause to see him—as his physician?
(*The Doctor looks to MARIA for help.*)
(*Pause.*)

MARIA

Two years ago when he strained his shoulder.

DR. QUARLES

Yes, that was it.

MR. NASHE

And as far as you knew, the patient was in good health?

DR. QUARLES

Yes.

MR. NASHE

At what time, Dr. Quarles, did you first see the body?

DR. QUARLES

At 6.30 p.m. yesterday.

MR. NASHE

Which was, let me see, the 21st instant. (*He writes.*) And how long, in your opinion, would you say the deceased had then been dead?

DR. QUARLES

No more than an hour. I came as soon as I got the message from Sir Cory.

MR. NASHE

(*Writing*) One hour. And have you since conducted the post-mortem examination?

DR. QUARLES

I have.

MR. NASHE

And in your opinion what caused the death of the deceased?

DR. QUARLES

A bullet had penetrated the heart, and was lodged . . .

MR. NASHE

Could you say at what range the shot had been fired?

DR. QUARLES

Yes. Point blank.

MR. NASHE

What leads you to that conclusion?

DR. QUARLES

The skin about the wound had been scorched.

MR. NASHE

In other words, self-inflicted?

DR. QUARLES

Yes.

MR. NASHE

Thank you, Doctor Quarles. You may stand down. Now, Sir Cory, may I ask you to give your evidence? I wish I could spare you this but (*looking at volume open before him*) "Jervis" is quite explicit and lays it down "that it is the duty of the Coroner to take the evidence of all persons who witnessed the accident, however obvious the cause may appear". Is that not right?

STRATTON

Most certainly. (*He takes DR. QUARLES's position.*)

MR. NASHE

I must say I feel my position most acutely. It is unfortunate that, on the first inquest I have had to hold, one of the witnesses

should be a famous judge. I feel it would be more appropriate if you, sir, were to question me. But let us get it over. I must first ask you, as the father, do you identify the deceased as the body of your son?

(MORCOMBE moves.)

I beg your pardon—we have omitted the formality of the oath.

(MORCOMBE administers it.)

That's put us right. Now, Sir Cory, may I repeat my question: "Do you as the father identify the deceased as the body of your son?"

(Slight pause. STRATTON smiles and takes up his professional manner with confidence.)

STRATTON

I think, Mr. Coroner, if you will allow me to say so, that that question contains its own answer. For, by assuming that I am the deceased's father, it follows that the deceased is necessarily my son. The only query in your question is whether I identify the deceased as being dead. And about that, there is no question.

MR. NASHE

There you are, you see; I'm sure we should change places. It would never do for me to leave a mistake like that in these records. Thank you for drawing my attention to it. But I think we can leave that question. May I ask you how you came to find the body?

STRATTON

I did not find it; nor could I say I discovered it, since the tragedy occurred in my own presence.

MR. NASHE

(Surprised) You mean to say that you saw your son shoot himself with your own eyes?

STRATTON

Yes,—but it was not my eyes which killed him.

MR. NASHE

Eh? Yes, I see. (*He scratches out.*) Dear, dear, I had no idea that you had witnessed this terrible tragedy yourself. My clumsy question must have been most painful to you. Please forgive me. May I ask you to describe what happened?

STRATTON

My son was standing here. (*He takes up the precise position at foot of stairs.*) I saw him suddenly draw a gun and take his own life.

MR. NASHE

How terrible for you.

STRATTON

. . . I tried to stop him; but before I could snatch the gun, it was too late.

MR. NASHE

(*To himself, genuinely puzzled*) What tragedy does this tragedy reveal? I cannot understand: he seemed so happy, when I last saw him—outside the Town Hall only last Saturday. He was so pleased the new Lock was built all to his own design. And I know how fond you two were of each other—it's unnecessary for me to ask if there had been a quarrel.

(*Slight pause. STRATTON glances at KATHERINE. She looks away.*)

STRATTON

There had been no quarrel: but what one might call a little family scene.

MR. NASHE

(*Embarrassed*) Quite so. (*Looking down at papers.*) Forgive me, Sir Cory, for prying into your privacy and intruding into a purely family matter—but I must ask you whether in your opinion the difference you speak of was sufficient to drive your son to such extreme action?

STRATTON

Under normal circumstances the difference between us would have had no consequences.

MR. NASHE

What then was abnormal?

STRATTON

Cory's frame of mind. Of late he had been most depressed.

MR. NASHE

Quite so.

STRATTON

I put it down to overwork.

MR. NASHE

Yes, yes—he certainly took on far too much. I saw him myself down at the river, out in all weathers. But what precisely precipitated this tragedy?

STRATTON

A gift of mine . . .

MR. NASHE

A gift? I don't understand.

STRATTON

Nor did I, until it was too late. But in retrospect I see that for years my son had suffered in the shadow of what the newspapers call my "brilliant career". Quite ridiculous nonsense, of course. But there it is; and only yesterday afternoon, to use his very words, he said: "that my success belittled his achievements" . . . He was, if it is possible for me to be objective, morbidly jealous of my position, both here and at the Bar. And it was to relieve this frustration of his which prompted me to make Kirnstone over to him at his marriage, as you know. (NASHE *nods ap-*

proval.) I hoped that his being master here would give him scope, and rid him of his feeling of inferiority. Perhaps I left too much for him to do,—what with the recent flood. For I found that even in control here he was still not happy.

And so yesterday afternoon, I urged him to go to London and immediately take silk so that in time he might take my place and gain my reputation and I made way for him, as a father should.

MR. NASHE

How generous!

STRATTON

But that was my mistake; for, by giving him the two things which he envied most, I took away the cause of his complaint, which of itself sustained him; and thus I left him with nothing but the gnawing sense of his own inadequacy. By making way for him, I unwittingly made his sense of failure absolute and quite complete. It was this which caused him to destroy himself before my very eyes—as though his death would redeem the humiliation of his life.

MR. NASHE

What a tragedy! I thought he was so proud of you. But there it is. . . . What father knows his own son? (*recovering*) or what son knows how much distress he brings upon a father? And all your sacrifice to this end! . . . Thank you, Sir Cory, for such a frank statement. Now forgive me, Lady Stratton, but I must call you as a formality.

(STRATTON *stands down*. MORCOMBE *administers the oath to MARIA who remains in her place by the fire*. KATHERINE *goes over and sits beside her as if to comfort her*.)

MR. NASHE

Now, Lady Stratton, will you tell me under what circumstances you first saw—I beg your pardon—realized that your son . . . ?

MARIA

I was in my room. I heard voices coming from here in the hall below. It sounded as if they were shouting.

MR. NASHE

You mean?

MARIA

My son, of course. I opened the door, and as I came down the stairs I heard . . .

MR. NASHE

Yes, Lady Stratton?

MARIA

My husband cry, "Don't shoot, for God's sake, Cory. . . ."
(*She is overcome. STRATTON goes over to her.*)

MR. NASHE

And then?

MARIA

My husband helped me to my room.
(*STRATTON leads MARIA to the stairs as he did at the end of Act Three.*)

STRATTON comforts MARIA as he helps her to her room off the balcony.)

MR. NASHE

Now, my dear Mrs. Stratton, tell me briefly when did you discover this terrible affair?

KATHERINE

I was in the library (*she points to the door*) when I heard my husband and his father.

MR. NASHE

Would you say they were quarrelling?

KATHERINE

Yes.

MR. NASHE

Did you hear what was said?

(STRATTON reappears from MARIA'S room and stands still at the question. There is a pause whilst KATHERINE, unobserved by MR. NASHE, who is writing, looks up at STRATTON, who stands still, looking down at her.)

Could you hear what was said?

KATHERINE

No. (STRATTON'S tension is relaxed). So I opened the door.

MR. NASHE

And what did you see?

(STRATTON, who is moving along the balcony, stops dead at the top of the stairs. KATHERINE answers with her eyes raised to him.)

KATHERINE

I saw my husband lying dead.

(STRATTON, relieved, begins to descend the stairs.)

MR. NASHE

But had you not heard a shot, Mrs. Stratton?

KATHERINE

Yes, I heard the shot.

MR. NASHE

(Taking her up) Then you did see the tragedy occur?

(STRATTON again stops dead on the same stair as MARIA did in Act Three.)

KATHERINE

No. I heard the shot before I opened the door.

(STRATTON descends.)

MR. NASHE

(*Writing*) Quite so. Thank you, Mrs. Stratton. I consider this Inquest now closed; and I will not call any further witnesses.

I find that the deceased, the late Cory Stratton, did take his own life whilst the balance of his mind was temporarily disturbed. (*He closes book and rises.*)

(*Slight pause.*)

DR. QUARLES

Would you like me to go up and see Lady Stratton, Sir Cory? Perhaps I could give her a sedative?

STRATTON

Thank you, Doctor, but I will see to it and make sure she sleeps. .

DR. QUARLES

Yes, sleep is all she needs. I'm afraid I must get along now: I promised to look in at Maddon Farm. I hate driving along those cliffs at night. I do wish they'd mend the roads. Well, let me know if there's anything I can do. (*He shakes STRATTON's hand.*)

STRATTON

Of course.

DR. QUARLES

You can ride along with me, Sergeant, as far as Lynton.

MORCOMBE

Thank you, Doctor.

DR. QUARLES

Good-bye, Mrs. Stratton.

I wish there were some opiate for grief

But there is no drug against this world's sorrows,

But this world's time,—the only consolation is:

Though the cure is slow, it is certain.

(*At door*) My, how the evenings are drawing in!

(*Goes out with MORCOMBE.*)

MR. NASHE

I must go too, but before I do, perhaps you will just sign this lease, Sir Cory, which I've made out for Tetcott Farm? I happen to have it here. It will save me a journey.

STRATTON

Certainly.

MR. NASHE

(*Taking deed from case*) As you will see, the new tenant has agreed to Mr. Colville's valuation. We have of course reserved the fishing, and as usual undertaken to maintain the river banks. (*Looking at lease*) But how stupid of me! This was drawn up at your son's instructions, as you were about to make this estate over to him, and this lease is, of course, in his name. I must draft another. (*About to put it away.*)

STRATTON

Why? As our names were the same, I can, as it were, sign in his stead.

MR. NASHE

Of course. How convenient! Perhaps I'd better just insert your title and orders. (*He does so.*)

STRATTON

(*Signing*) There you are. Now, Katherine, will you witness my signature? (*Hands pen to her.*)

MR. NASHE

(*To KATHERINE, who is signing*) Just name and address. That's it. But you must add your description.

STRATTON

Just put "Wife".

KATHERINE

You are forgetting—that at least has changed. Now I must put “Widow”. (*She writes the word.*)

MR. NASHE

Yes, of course. There, that will do. Thank you. That’s put us right. (*To STRATTON*) Perhaps you will take this valuation now, sir, and just glance through it.

(*STRATTON goes to desk and sits reading the deed carefully. MR. NASHE turns to KATHERINE and resumes the formality of the opening of this scene.*)

Good-bye, Mrs. Stratton.

Perhaps this thought may moderate your grief:

Those whom we love cannot die unless our love dies;

For after all, what is life but to be loved?

All of us live only in each other’s hearts.

He lives whilst we remember him,

And dies only when we forget him.

(*STRATTON is not listening but sits checking the valuation.*)

KATHERINE

(*Aloud, but as if to herself*) That I will never do,

Though I may seem to.

There is more to grief than mourning

And more to life than living.

Sometimes we seem to laugh through sorrow

When our sorrow is too terrible to be shown. . . .

MR. NASHE

(*Con conversationally*) Yes, none of us know one another.

KATHERINE

(*Unaware of him*) If those whom we love

Live on in our hearts,

Then those who love us

Are also at our mercy;

And sometimes mercy can be a slow revenge.

As serpents kill with a kiss,
So may a woman. . . .
Yes, though I may seem to forget
That may be the way I remember.

MR. NASHE

(Misunderstanding) Why, of course. You are still young . . .

KATHERINE

No woman's ever young, Mr. Nashe. Some of us suffer more.
That is all.

MR. NASHE

(At door) Well—I must be going. Good-bye, Mrs. Stratton.
How the evenings are drawing in. *(He goes out.)*

(KATHERINE watches STRATTON at the desk. He seems absorbed in his work. Suddenly she laughs almost hysterically.)

STRATTON

(Rising from desk) What are you laughing at?

KATHERINE

Why shouldn't I? What have I got to cry about? Didn't you hear what he said?

STRATTON

(Casually) No.

KATHERINE

That makes it funnier still.

STRATTON

Well, what did he say?

KATHERINE

He said that those whom we love cannot die;
And, therefore, Cory is not dead.

STRATTON

(*Off-hand*) In a sense, that's true.

KATHERINE

(*Looking at him as he comes towards her*) Yes, but I didn't know how true, how horribly true.

So what have I got to cry about?

But what he didn't say is what I now know:

Cory cannot die, and I must live

Hating his image and loathing the ghost that he's become.

STRATTON

What do you mean? I don't understand you.

KATHERINE

No, but you will.

STRATTON

I think you're a little overwrought. The inquest must have been a great strain to you.

KATHERINE

To me?

STRATTON

(*Quite unaware*) I must say I thought you gave your evidence very well. From a professional point of view I commend such brevity.

KATHERINE

Thank you.

All the same, you did seem a little nervous whilst I was giving it. (*Attacking*) Why was that?

STRATTON

I was afraid.

KATHERINE

(*Quietly*) Of what?

STRATTON

(*Calmly*) That you might break down.

KATHERINE

(*Attacking*) How?

STRATTON

(*Quite unaware*) As Maria did. A most upsetting business.

KATHERINE

(*Taken aback*) "A most upsetting business." (*Attacking*) You weren't by any chance worried whether my evidence would fit with yours?

STRATTON

(*Quite calmly*) And what else could it do? You merely had to tell them what you saw and heard—as I did too . . .

KATHERINE

But what if I had seen more than I said?

STRATTON

. . . Then you'd have had more to say. But anyhow the verdict would have been the same . . . the poor boy's mind must have been disturbed.

KATHERINE

(*Speechless*) You . . .?

STRATTON

Yes, it's hard for a father to admit and to confess . . .

KATHERINE

(*Turning on the word and anticipating*) Yes, yes, to what?

STRATTON

. . . that his son died by his own hand.

KATHERINE

(*Taking STRATTON's hand in hers*) Yes, by his own hand. But how like his hand is your hand; the same long fingers, the same shaped nails. Your hands are so alike—one might almost say that he died by your hand.

(*STRATTON removes his hand. KATHERINE smiles.*)

But that takes the likeness too far—for that would make it murder, wouldn't it?

STRATTON

(*Unaffected by her attack, but with self-pity*) We were so near and so alike; I feel as though I've lost . . .

KATHERINE

Yes?

STRATTON

My second self——

KATHERINE

No more?

STRATTON

And am now object without reflection. It's hard for a father to lose his only son.

(*KATHERINE nearly explodes at this dishonest self-pity. But instantly regains her control.*)

What were you going to say?

KATHERINE

(*More to herself and with genuine tenderness, her back to STRATTON*)

Oh, nothing.

I was thinking of the loss his life is to my life.

And by taking his, how much he has maimed the rest of mine.

But the rest is his; for, now my life will be

As restless as a river which cannot find its sea.

In my embrace, he flowed, as I, in his;

And thus our love was so contained

That neither knew the flood that was the other.

Nor will he know now. . . .

STRATTON

(Coming up behind her and touching her) What, Katherine?

KATHERINE

. . . the wilderness that I am now.

STRATTON

(Turning her to him) Nonsense, the waste was his. His suicide was selfish.

KATHERINE

(Quietly) His suicide was murder.

STRATTON

(Retreating) What do you mean?

KATHERINE

(Smiling as she plays with him, pleased at this first sign of his uneasiness, determined to exploit it) I mean no more than this:

That nobody's life's their own, and nobody's death's their own.

For each of us live within each other's life,

With all of us dying within each other's death.

And so, it follows that by his suicide, he murdered me.

Though no judge would recognize his guilt—would you?

Nor any doctor say that I was dead—would he?

But not all the dead are buried—are they?

Some of us flaunt around in the most fashionable shrouds

And as living ghosts are haunted by the unburied dead—aren't we?

But he will rest—won't he?

No conscience sleeps so well as one which was or

Is so blind, it did or

Does not see the sin which it commits or

It committed.

Well, there it is: my husband's dead. His father is alive and well.

Yes, very well. *(Seeing him unbroken, she turns away deflated.)*

(Pause.)

(*Casually*) But shouldn't you go and see Maria?

STRATTON

(*Now on defensive*) Why?

KATHERINE

(*Turning, puzzled at this effect*) Why not?

STRATTON

(*Off guard*) No, let me stay here with you:
I cannot bear the sight of her pathetic grief,
Or bear the look that comes from her blind eyes.

KATHERINE

(*Understanding*) I see.

(*She goes up to him and puts her face before his.*)
And mine?

STRATTON

And yours? (*He turns away.*)

KATHERINE

(*Attacking*) Why do you turn away?
I am not blind. I cannot look through you.
Nor have I any tears to drain your pity
Nor disturb the balance of the mind that was disturbed
To draw from you—I mean from him: remorse.

STRATTON

(*Attacking*) Yes, why is that? Why don't you weep?

KATHERINE

(*Quietly*) You dare to ask me that?

STRATTON

Why not?

KATHERINE

(As though her defences were down and with a deliberate tenderness towards him) Then I will tell you.

Grief's difficult enough to bear;

But lack of grief is more terrible still.

It is this emptiness which is too heavy to be borne alone; isn't it?

Why don't I grieve for him whom I have loved?

STRATTON

(Rising to it) Yes, why is that?

KATHERINE

You ask that question

Only because you know its answer.

STRATTON

(Passionately) But, Katherine, let me hear it!

KATHERINE

One thing is certain:

All love is all embryonic grief.

And if grief's not born when he whom I loved lies dead,

Then, as you would say, it follows logically

That I did not love him who has died or . . .

STRATTON

Or?

KATHERINE

(Teasingly) . . . he whom I loved is not dead.

STRATTON

(Almost triumphantly) It's certain *he* is dead!

KATHERINE

(Smiling) Then it's certain that I did not love him.

STRATTON

(Triumphantly and taking her into his arms) Katherine!

KATHERINE

How could I love the echo,
After I had heard your voice?
Or tolerate the copy
When the original stood by his side
Or stands before my eyes?
Till his eyes became your eyes
And his lips became your lips,
Making our intimacy imitation
In which I loved him for his likeness
And loathed him for his resemblance
That made my embrace deceit
And all my passion counterfeit?
Now you know why I cannot grieve
For your son I did not love: for it is you I love.

STRATTON

It is as I had dreamed.

KATHERINE

(Knowingly) Is it?

STRATTON

Precisely.
Sometimes we seem to wake
And waking recognize a dream.
It is as though our blind thoughts wove
Upon the loom of night
Frail patterns which become strong prisons;
It is as though those silken threads
Spun into a . . .
(Unconsciously he puts his hand to his neck.)

KATHERINE

(Quietly) . . . silken rope?

STRATTON

(Not hearing her) . . . It is as though we go,

Whereas it is we're led
Round and round a roundabout.
It is as though we tread
 Within the footsteps of the dead,
Thinking we're dancing
 Whereas it is we're danced.
It is as though we're dreaming
 Whereas it is we're dreamt.
—Yes, a son's death fits into a father's dream,
Just as your love breaks yet makes another.

KATHERINE

Why mention him?
Or talk of father and of son?
They were the same man, weren't they?
And you are that man, aren't you?
His looks were yours reflected,
His talents were yours diluted.
(*Whispering*) His life, borrowed from your life, was your life
 extended.
Only in death did he establish his identity—for his death was
 self-inflicted.

STRATTON

Yes, yes.
Even his love for you was mine projected!
Katherine——

KATHERINE

Why do we whisper when we love?
Is it a sin to love?

STRATTON

If it's a sin to love, then I
Sin, for I commit idolatry;
And at your lips worship,
And in your eyes kneel to adore.

If it's a sin to love, then who
Can judge that sin but those who love?
And they would not punish us,
Knowing we suffer as we sin.

KATHERINE

But you sound as though you hated me.

STRATTON

So I do.

All men hate the thing they love
Which bends the shoulders of their pride
And makes them kneel through their threadbare souls
Till grovelling in humility
They know the tyranny of liturgy.
All men hate the thing they love,
Whether it's a god or whether it's a woman.
So do I,

Hate you, and in that you
Should know the intensity of my love.
' Love that doesn't look like hate
' Is too moderate to be love.

KATHERINE

(Meaningly to him) Perhaps hate can look like love? *(Then to herself as though she had suddenly realized something she gets up and goes across the room. She looks at the son's portrait.)* When it does, there is the danger that it is too temperate to be hate and contains an element of love. . . .

(With resolution) I'll make it wholly hate.

(Turning upon him) God! how I hate you.

STRATTON

(Not believing) I thank you for your love.

KATHERINE

(Almost hysterical) Fool. You don't understand.

STRATTON

Yes I do
No God or woman knows
How much a man resents
Those passions which confound his purpose
Till they become his purpose
Whilst he as a sleepwalker,
Walks back into the nightmare that his life becomes.

KATHERINE

(*Again in control of the situation and herself*) Yes, nothing destroys
a man
So ruthlessly as love or can make him suffer more.
(*Vamping him*) So come, give me your hand and tell me why
you love.

STRATTON

I love you for your youth.

KATHERINE

No, you love me for your own.

STRATTON

I love you for your life—all right, I love you for my own.
Now dare to tell me this is no time nor place
And I will tell you there is no time until we love
Nor are we anywhere until by love we are identified.

KATHERINE

Look into my eyes.

STRATTON

No, give me your lips!
Your lips have set this night on fire,
In flames of blood my fierce desire
Will burn this embroidery of night
Down to the wilderness of light;

Then to the oasis of your eyes, I'll kneel and drink
And thirsting more, crawl back and sink
Into the mirage which you are—
To drown within the desert that I am.
(*They kiss.*)

KATHERINE

Now look into my eyes.
(*He does so, then quickly turns away in terror.*)

STRATTON

No! . . .

KATHERINE

(*Smiling to herself behind his back but with tenderness in her voice*)
Why do you turn away?

STRATTON

I saw his image there! . . .

KATHERINE

You mean your own reflection, don't you?
(*She follows him across the room, then coaxes him to her.*)
But come, come and sit down again
I have something to say to you.
(*She leads him to the sofa.*)

STRATTON

(*Quietly*) What is it?

KATHERINE

(*With the slow deliberation of a panther about to spring*) This:
I love you.

STRATTON

(*Rising to it*) You love me?

K*

KATHERINE

(*Now springing on the name*) Yes, Cory, I love you, Cory. It is you I love, Cory.

STRATTON

(*Angry*) Don't call me by his name!
I want to be loved for my own sake, not for his.
Don't call me by his name!

KATHERINE

(*Reassuring him tenderly*) It's yours as well—isn't it?
Besides wasn't he only your echo?
Not two of you, but one of you.

STRATTON

No! No! we were separate. . . .

KATHERINE

(*As though turning the screw*) Then, one has died?

STRATTON

Yes, yes. . . .

KATHERINE

More than just your own shadow cast?

STRATTON

(*Looking up to MARIA'S room as his conscience wakes*) My son has died.

KATHERINE

(*With triumph*) Still suicide?
(*Pause.*)

Answer me!

STRATTON

Oh, God! . . .

KATHERINE

Or was it murder?

STRATTON

(Now realizing the enormity of his crime) Murder of my son?

KATHERINE

(Playing with him as though determined to make him suffer more)
No, murder of your father!

(STRATTON looks up with insane bewilderment.)

Thus giving me his son

Free at last from the ghost that was his father,
Who, haunting, spoiled our life.

Come, Cory, stand up! At last you're free.

Free from the fear of growing old, cold and the grave's embrace.

For my embrace will forever keep you young

My love contains your continuity

My love assures your immortality.

(He gets to his feet.)

Come, Cory, what gives life back to a son

More than his father's death?

(As a sleepwalker STRATTON walks into her embrace. He stands with his hands to his side. She holds him as a spider does a fly. Then raising her eyes in triumph she looks over STRATTON's shoulder at the portrait of the son. She laughs as she did when looking at the father's portrait at the beginning of Act One.)

STRATTON

(Echoing son) What are you laughing at? Are you laughing at me?

KATHERINE

No, at your portrait which staring over

Your shoulder seems to disapprove.

(STRATTON looks up at the opposite wall, the one facing him, and sees his own portrait.)

Oh, take it down!

(STRATTON goes to remove his own portrait. KATHERINE smiles.)

No, not that one. I said your own.

STRATTON

(He looks insanely from one portrait to the other) Which one?

KATHERINE

(*Pointing at son's*) Your own, Cory. That one of course.

STRATTON

(*Insane jubilation*) Yes, yes, of course.

My son was me: therefore I am my son.

By direct issue.

Yes, let's take him down.

Who wants his likeness staring over his own shoulder

Like an unrecognizable figure from a remembered dream?

(*He lifts it down.*)

How light it is.

KATHERINE

What, Cory?

STRATTON

(*With portrait in his hand*) This moment which is without a past
and is without a future.

My father wanted to be me

I wanted to be my father,

And both of us wanted to be without the other.

(*He looks round the room at the other portraits.*)

Ay me now Eimi; I am the I of all these Eyes

And will be heir and never ancestor

Leap-frogging from one generation to another

And can never, never die!

(*Enter COURTENAY.*)

STRATTON still stares with insane triumph at Cory's portrait
which he holds in his hands.)

Who? . . . What do you want?

COURTENAY

(*Friendly*) Nothing, I came to . . .

STRATTON

. . . congratulate me?

COURTENAY

I came to sympathize. Your loss . . .

STRATTON

(*Aggressively*) Whose loss? I don't want your sympathy.
Congratulate me.

Didn't you challenge me to see my image behind the glass?
Well, here is my image (*showing portrait of son*) here is the
glass . . . (*pointing to his own face*).

COURTENAY

You're very bitter. Can't we let the past . . .

STRATTON

. . . bury the past. (*He laughs*) No, it's the future I intend to
bury.

COURTENAY

(*Casually*) Yes, I see what you mean. . . .

STRATTON

Do you? I wonder! Tell him, Katherine,
Tell him.

(*She looks away and remains silent.*)
Go on, tell him who's dead.

COURTENAY

(*Quietly*) But I know.

STRATTON

(*Obstinately challenging him*) Who? Who?

COURTENAY

(*Sympathetically*) You . . .

(*STRATTON steps back.* COURTENAY goes on quite unaware.)
. . . for when an only son dies,
His father dies also.

STRATTON

(Bewildered and deflated) . . . Both?

COURTENAY

(Con conversationally, not noticing STRATTON's distress) Yes, in a sense that's true; when a son dies

And that son an only son,
The father is, by the death, denied that physical immortality
Which a son assures a father by keeping his looks *(glancing at portraits round room)* and line alive.

I suppose that's the way all sons repay their fathers for their birth

In that, whilst they live—their fathers cannot wholly die.

Isn't that what you mean, Cory?

(STRATTON's aggressive jubilation is now completely dispersed. He looks pathetically to KATHERINE.)

KATHERINE

Yes, that's what he meant.

STRATTON

(Silently) You . . .

COURTENAY

(Quite unaware and in the same tone) Yes, I thought it was;

As I was coming up the drive

I felt as if the beeches knew

That his death was their death, too.

For one Stratton planted them,

And another protected them; as they grew

From Spring to Autumn,

Through Father to Son, till they stand

Proud in their purple avenue

As symbols of your family's continuity;

Sentinels assuring you that immortality.

And you mean: now who will there be to follow after,
To free them from the ivy's clutches

Or to lop their dead or dying branches?

Yes, I know what you are thinking: you are thinking,
Now there will be no one to save them
From the terror of the circular saw or
The hurried auction of their slow-grown timber:
And you wonder who will ever,
Counting the rings on their stumps, will remember
How this family grew and fell like a tree this December.
Isn't that what you are thinking?

KATHERINE

Yes, that's what he was saying.

COURTENAY

I thought it was;
And it's difficult enough to console you for your son's death
Let alone for your own, which his entails,
Now the entail's broken—
Now the swollen river's fallen
And flows out with its last flood.
Yes, yes, it's as hard to console a man for his son's death
As it is to console man for the death of the Son of Man.
And though our grief looks more like anger,
Anger which hides remorse,
What are all men doing but mourning for their sons
And that Son, an only Son . . . ?

STRATTON

(*Throwing portrait violently to floor*) Get out!

COURTENAY

I?

STRATTON

Get out!

COURTENAY

What have I said?

STRATTON

Nothing.

COURTENAY

Then, what have I done?

STRATTON

Nothing. For God's sake go.

(He buries his head in his hands. The portrait is on the floor beside him.)

COURTENAY

Good-bye, Katherine. Let me know if there's anything I can do to help you.

KATHERINE

Thank you. *(She looks at STRATTON)* But I think I can manage now. . . .

(COURTENAY goes out.)

STRATTON

Oh, my God, where in this wide wide world

Is there space enough or place

To hide a man's small heart?

And when will time in all its tedious travail

Find in its yawning womb

That moment which was gone and give me back my son?

(Quietly) He is dead, Katherine.

KATHERINE

(As though making responses) Why did he die, Cory?

STRATTON

He is dead, Katherine!

KATHERINE

How did he die, Cory?

STRATTON

How?

KATHERINE

Yes, *Cory*, did *Cory* take his own life, *Cory*?

STRATTON

No. Katherine. It was as you know it was: it was murder.

(She anticipates: he pulls himself together.)

Murder of his father, murder of his mother and of you too, Katherine.

It was as Courtenay said: each of these portraits now dies its final death

And their unborn heirs whose eyes looked through your eyes
Are with their ancestors all cut off.

Now the river returns to its source

And this house which was a monument of order

Cut from the inarticulate undergrowth

Must crack and fall and kneel into the nettles once again.

But you should go. Don't make the mistake I made.

I reached for the future, you must not cling to the past.

Why don't you go?

KATHERINE

(Coming to him) Because I love you, *Cory*.

STRATTON

(He laughs) But he is dead, Katherine. How can I ever be sure
that you love me for my own sake and not for his?

KATHERINE

(Quietly) You cannot.

STRATTON

No I cannot.

He was my echo, now I am his.

So go. Leave me alone.

KATHERINE

All right I will. But can you stay here in this house with

Maria's grief to remind you? And her blind eyes to stare at you, to look through you? (*She goes to the door.*)

STRATTON

No! No!

KATHERINE

(*Smiling and coming back*) Then take me in your arms.

(*Pause, then with immense tenderness.*)

Come; if I can deny the future

Cannot you forget the past?

Come! Take me in your arms

And from my lips suck back your youth again.

(*She kisses him passionately.*)

STRATTON

God, how I love you.

KATHERINE

God, how I hate you.

(*STRATTON draws back. KATHERINE still holds him in the embrace.*)

Yes, you were warned weren't you?

For if those whom we love

Live on in our hearts, as Cory does in mine,

Then those who love us, as you love me,

Are also at our mercy.

(*And what else has a woman but her lips*

To taste how sweet is slow revenge?

You desired your son's life, thinking it was your life, didn't you?

And desiring that, you desired me,

But a father who lechers after his son's wife

Must make certain his son doesn't take his own life.

For if he does, the father can never be certain of his son's wife

He can only be sure of his own death,—

As you were of his, for with this hand, so like his hand,

You shot him.

Whilst I, with these eyes, watched you.

Now look into my eyes and see the ghost that he and you've become;

And take this kiss for him whom I adore

And whom you murdered.

(She kisses him passionately and then throws him to the ground. The light is discreetly focused on STRATTON's portrait. She looks and then laughs at him as she goes towards the door.)

There's nothing so ridiculous as a man who thinks he is a judge,
Or as pathetic as an old man grovelling for his youth.

(She goes out. He watches the door closing behind her.)

STRATTON

Yes, that's how the door of birth swings

Slams and shuts us into life,

And every brat born;

Saint, sinner, judge or jailor

Is with the most commendable equality

Each imprisoned in his own personality

To drag a chain of trivial dreams

Round and round his narrow cell;

| And our jailer is our pride.

"In for a stretch"—they used to say.

"Hard labour" I would add and watched them grin back significantly.

For what pick-axe can penetrate our heart?

But if it does, then whose shoulder

Can shovel away this mountain of remorse?

(He picks up CORY's portrait.)

Dear Christ, what have I done?

I have with my own hands killed my son.

Oh, my son, what have I done?

I have with my own hands crucified my Christ.

(He throws portrait to floor.)

| And that is just! God can expect no less from us than what God does to Man.

And surely the Son of Man can bear

What any man's son bears from his birth

For are we not all strung up, stretched by our nature this way

And by our spirit that way, nailed by our desires

To the cross of our self-love and pride.
That is why Man crucifies Christ daily
Because Man is not only on a Cross himself
But is indeed the all-embracing Cross itself.
It is all endless crucifixion. Endless—

(MARIA is seen moving along the balcony. She appears like an old woman and is lame. STRATTON cannot see her. The music is heard.)

Endless.

And all of us betray the thing we love,
Then find it is our soul that we have sold
For who is not a Judas to himself?
Have I betrayed myself?
I dared to know my nature.
Dare I now look upon my love on whose smooth skin I wrote
my suffering
And let my blinded conscience read what I have written
And face my soul as it crawls out lame as a leper?

(He turns and sees MARIA feeling her way down the stairs. STRATTON makes a movement towards her. Instantly MARIA becomes radiantly beautiful.)

MARIA

(Going towards him) Now you have spoken, my eyes can open
And I can see and read what you have written.

STRATTON

No! No!

MARIA

Yes, love can mend what life has broken.
I know what you have done;
But to love as I love you,
Is of necessity to forgive.

STRATTON

(With terror) Forgive? Better to be damned than be redeemed
And have your eyes staring through my eyes;

For great love like yours must *inevitably* shatter a man's small
soul
As though it were a glass.
I beg you not to come.

MARIA

(*Still approaching*) Love of *necessity* must be destroyed
By the hands of what it loves.

STRATTON

(*His hands rise almost involuntarily*) Stay where you are.
For a man's hands must *inevitably* express his heart
And his heart is full of fear.

MARIA

(*Still approaching till her neck is between his hands*) No, my love,
it is better to die
And live in you
Than to live myself
And to be dead to you.

STRATTON

For great love is a tyranny like sanity
And all our dreams become realities.
(*STRATTON turns his eyes away from her, his hands strangle her.*)
Thus do we kill the things we love
To find it is our soul that's died
Endless, endless! . . .
(*He lets the body fall. He stares up at his portrait.*)
When an idol falls and that idol is yourself, you fall too.
And all is desperation.
Hopeless, hopeless! . . .

I waded up to my neck in my own nature
And found nothing but despair
That self-expression, this self-disgust
Madness, madness! . . .

(*He turns from the portrait.*)

Is there nowhere where a man can find that peace which is more
restful than a sleep

A sleep without a dream?

Is God pitiless, pitiless?

(He stands over the body.)

No, as her body fell so did my spirit rise

For those whom we love live on in our hearts

And by their death they redeem our life

And by their death our soul is born again

And we find that release that lifts our heart like a lark that sings

Gladness, gladness.

Yes, it is there in self-effacement in humility there, there.

But how can I dredge this jewel

From all the sludge of my deep heart

Unless I kneel to lift it?

*(He kneels by the body. The voice above the music is heard saying the
epilogue.)*

(What a thing is man,

Blessed with a spirit

Damned with a nature

His eyes seeking heaven

Whilst his hands construct hell.

What a thing is man

He is both crucified

And crucifier

Oh, Christ, may Thy Mercy

Rain compassion on this desert that is man.

The music continues as

THE CURTAIN FALLS

POSTSCRIPT
(Not to be played)

Now will our old house stare
Through uncurtained windows
And its corridors ache
With remembered echoes;
And its great roof weep
For forgotten sorrows
And the briar will replace the rose.

Industrious spiders
Will weave their tapestries;
And damp will embroider
The walls; as dust, gently
Falls, so lightly to cover
All in its secrecy
And the briar will replace the rose.

Lawns will return to sedge,
Whilst weeds in their wantonness
Sprawl where the gates embrace;
As nettles lease all, docks possess all
And the wind collects its tithe
Destaining with ruthlessness
And the briar will replace the rose.

For beauty now grows old
And loveliness decays,
And lips which once made lips
And eyes which once made eyes
And hands which have reached
Through centuries—all fall away
And the briar will replace the rose.

For when the future's broken
Even the past's made barren;
Like an unplucked apple
On a leafless tree,
Its breast hangs shrivelled.
So let the blind wind laugh
Over our undecipherable epitaph
And the briar replace the rose.

R.D.

、 1948.

